

Interview with new ChemLawn chief

Stronger emphasis on customer service needed

By **ELLIOT MARAS**
Editor

EXCLUSIVE—Cool and collected in his tidy, spacious office at ChemLawn Services Corp. headquarters, Michael Shannon has the self assurance of a man who knows where he's

going.

Shannon, executive vice president and chief financial and administrative officer of Ecolab, Inc., was named president of ChemLawn in June. He shuttles regularly between Columbus and St. Paul.

Shannon, one month

into his new job, identifies the pivotal issue for the lawn care industry as it enters a new phase of development—customer service. Gone are the days, says he, of the curious customer who was willing to buy whatever the LCO was selling.

To steer ChemLawn to smooth sailing through this new era, Shannon intends to build a team capable of enforcing a service emphasis throughout the organization.

He brings with him Gene Wilson, operations director, previously with Pizza

Hut, and Gary Yeakle, marketing director, previously with McDonald's.

When asked about the poor second quarter earnings, Shannon points out that the company actually had a better second quarter than it did last year. This

See **SERVICE** Page 44

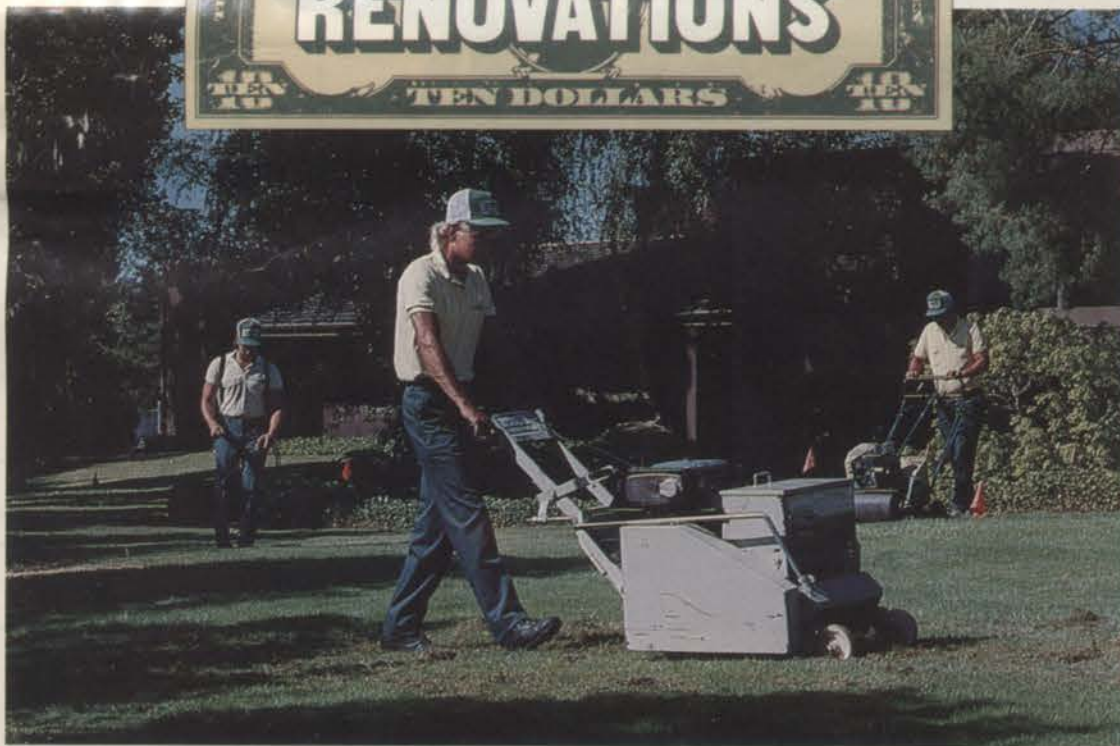
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Renovation: The Bizon Maintenance Co. at work. Irrigation equipment is flagged to prevent damage.

Customer demand: Going up or down?

By **ELLIOT MARAS**
Editor

The full impact of the Great Drought on lawn care sales will not be known till next spring. Additional demand will be determined by the amount of turf that fails to recover from dormancy.

In the short-term, many companies in the severely-afflicted Midwest are suffering cash-flow problems due to cancellations of late summer applications. Third-round cancels ran 5 to 10 percent for most firms.

The question facing LCOs is to what extent the turf renovation work in the fall and spring will offset the production slowdown that hit in mid summer. The demand for tree and ornamental repair will also be strong.

"Everybody's anticipating

trying to make up for skips or cancellations," says Phil Gardner, vice president of lawn care sales for Rocky
See **DEMAND** Page 37

PLCAA to host lawn care critic

ATLANTA—Mary O'Brien, information coordinator for the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, will speak at the Professional Lawn Care Association of America Conference in New Orleans.

The PLCAA's purpose in hosting the lawn care critic is to foster a meeting of the minds between LCOs and their critics, says PLCAA

See **CRITIC** Page 47

INSIDE

TODAY'S TURF

Prof. Tony Koski considers ways to prevent long-term turf damage resulting from the summer drought.

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NEXT MONTH

- How some firms promote irrigation services.
- Previews for the PLCAA and Green Team conventions in November.

Drought-stressed lawns offer renovation dollars

By **JAMES E. GUYETTE**
Managing Editor

The Great Drought of 1988 can mean money in the pockets of turf managers if they correctly market lawn renovation projects and other services.

"If I were in the lawn care business I'd be out there ring-

ing doorbells," says James R. Watson, agronomist and vice president at the Toro Co.

"In my neighborhood there isn't one lawn where I wouldn't recommend (at least) throwing some extra seed on it," says Watson, who lives in the Minneapolis area.

Some equipment manufacturers are reporting shortages as lawn renovations promise to be a popular item this fall as the drought leaves its dusty trail throughout the U.S.

"Use it as an opportunity," says Ron Kujawa, president of KEI Enterprises in Cudahy,

See **DROUGHT** Page 18

LATE NEWS

LCOs object to new N.Y. reg plan

NEW YORK—New York LCOs have asked the state not to approve a new set of lawn care regulations. The regs would take effect next year.

The Department of Environmental Conservation, which has been battling with the New York green industries for two years now, wants LCOs to post warning signs at 75-, 100- or 150-foot intervals, depending on the size of the signs.

The signs would either be 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches, 8 1/2 by 11 inches, or 12 by 12 inches. The applicator would be responsible for keeping them posted for 24 hours.

Instead, LCOs would like to just post one sign in the front and one sign in the back of the yard.

Other provisions the LCOs object to are:

- LCOs must notify customers 48 hours in advance of applications.

See **OBJECT** Page 43

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ABIP BPA

Ohio anti-lawn care lobbyists weren't happy with a planning agency's report that concluded lawn chemicals aren't especially dangerous. Disgruntled members recently let it be known that they didn't agree with the findings of the task force, even though the organizations they represent were part of the task force.

The report, summarized in July's LAWN CARE INDUSTRY, concluded that health and environmental risks are low when lawn chemicals are applied properly. It is the most comprehensive study prepared by a coalition of regulatory,

industry and environmental groups.

Dissatisfied members of the environmental groups recently asked one city manager to remove his name from the report. He said he didn't see what this would accomplish.

On a more positive note, the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club warmly received representatives of ChemLawn and Davey recently.

Davey's Roger Funk explained his firm's Plant Health Care program which emphasizes less pesticide use.

A ChemLawn official spoke

about possibilities the company envisioned for reducing pesticide use.

Weedeater is entering the professional turf market next fall. The company is introducing a line of Weedeaters and blowers geared toward commercial use. A pro chainsaw already is on the market.

Electrolux, the European giant known for its vacuum cleaners, has purchased Poulan/Weedeater. According to a company spokesman, it plans to make a sizeable investment in the commercial line of power tools. LCI

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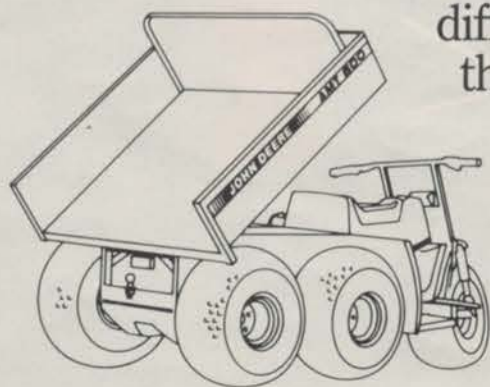
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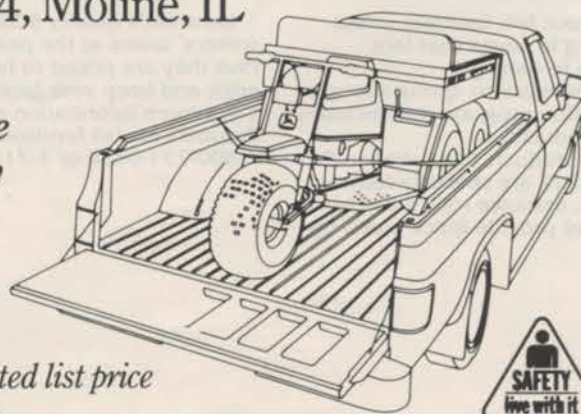
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Was heat wave the wave of the future?

The long-term ramifications of the Drought of '88 on our customers' lawns won't be clear until next spring. But if scientists who say the drought was caused by changing weather patterns are correct, the consequences could be much more serious.

LCOs and mowing/management contractors should carefully review the changes that the protracted, blistering heat brought about. Fall marketing literature should make mention of

things like the need to maintain insecticide treatments during dry spells and the importance of having good nitrogen supply to bring a lawn out of dormancy.

We should also be ready to speak intelligently about the "greenhouse" effect that might be causing a shift in weather patterns.

Newsweek, in its July 11th cover story, described how synthetically-produced gases, largely carbon dioxide, have been accumulating in the air and holding heat that would



ELLIOT MARAS
EDITOR

otherwise escape into the atmosphere.

The past summer may have been a natural aberration, the article said, but evidence indicates a warming trend under way.

Just what does the

"greenhouse" effect mean for the green industries? It means we must be ready to adjust our traditional practices. But there's more.

If hot dry summers are in fact here to stay, look forward to a renewed environmental consciousness among the populace.

And environmental consciousness can be tough on our industry if we do not take it upon ourselves to inform people about our products and services. Hopefully, we've already learned that.

The concern has already started to snowball. Consider the following:

Newsweek followed up its greenhouse article with an update on the ozone issue. Most of you are probably familiar with reports about how certain synthetic chemicals found in refrigerators and fast-food containers are shredding the protective ozone layer.

The following week, *Newsweek* and *Time* ran cover stories on a rather new issue—ocean pollution. It's closing our beaches and making fish unsafe to eat.

I've also been noticing more updates on acid rain. One issue feeds another.

What should our industry do?

First, recognize that we, like our customers, are citizens of Planet Earth. We should be concerned about these problems.

As an industry, we also need to consider how the concerns of our fellow citizens will affect our livelihoods. Their concerns can actually have a positive impact.

The reporting on the greenhouse effect and these other issues will put the lawn pesticide controversy into proper perspective. These issues are more immediate than the potential threats (if any) posed by diluted lawn herbicides.

The public does, however, have the capacity to lump all chemical use in the same villainous category. Here is where our role as educators comes in. We must be prepared to identify the specific causes of the more serious environmental problems.

Solutions to the greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, ocean pollution and acid rain are frighteningly evasive at present. More money is needed for research.

As an industry devoted to enhancement of the environment, we should visibly support such research.

But only an *informed* public, not a *misinformed* one, will facilitate constructive government policies.

For us, the correct posture is not a defensive one that says we are not the problem. Instead, we should be prepared to educate customers and legislators about today's environmental problems.

To do this, we need to be informed. Start reading.

Elliot Maras

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Eco Soil custom mixes fertilizer blends on-site

By **ELLIOT MARAS**
Editor

While most of its competitors are diversifying into new services, Eco Soil Systems of Lincoln, Neb. is bucking the trend to focus more intensely on the basic lawn care service—fertilization.

Soil testing and individualized custom fertilizer blending are the specialties of this year-old lawn care/golf course management firm.

Soil samples are first taken and sent to A & L Laboratories in Omaha, which analyzes levels of major nutrients, trace elements, organic matter, pH, etc. (23 total nutrient readings.)

'You can get a lot of variation in terms of the needs of each lawn.'

Recommendations are then made for a fertilizer blend designed to create the proper nutrient balance for each customer.

"You create the healthiest plant possible, which in turn will be more resistant to insects and funguses, etc.," says Terry Simpson, company president. "Anyone can get a soil test. It's knowing what to do with it when you get it that separates us from other companies."

Simpson, who studied at the University of Nebraska, says the recommendations are based on the work of several researchers. He notes that a recent article written by Nick Christians, Ph.D., of Iowa State University points to the importance of iron, sulfur and manganese in proper plant photosynthesis.

A mix for one client includes specific amounts of 14 different nutrients and soil conditioners: calcium lime, ammonium sulfate, ammonium nitrate, humic acid, Calphos (a phosphorous source), potassium sulfate, sulfur, zinc sulfate, manganese sulfate, iron sulfate, copper sulfate, boron, a microbial product, and a trace element foliar fertilizer.

The company relies on four different nitrogen sources—ammonium sulfate, calcium nitrate, ammonium nitrate and potassium nitrate. The phosphorous source is soft rock phosphate.

"We know as we bring those levels to where we want them, the plant is going to be fairly resistant," says Robert Baty, systems analyst. He says nutrient levels are often too high or too low in many lawns, and most are suffering from compaction.

"You can get a lot of variation in terms of the needs of each lawn," Simpson says.

The customized program will enable a reduction in the amount of pesticide treatments needed, Simpson says. "The second year you start seeing some change," he says. In the third year, he expects significant reductions in the amount of herbicide, insecticide and fungicide needed.

All blends include some soil conditioner. Two types are used. Humic acid, which helps stimulate microbial soil life



In the field: Robert Baty (left) and Mike Williams of Eco Soil Systems take soil samples.

and helps make nutrients more available to the plant roots—and a microbial liquid soil conditioner. The humic acid is 50 percent carbon, Simpson says, which enhances nutrient and water retention.

He stresses that the company is selling a service, not products. All treatments are mixed on-site using a blender.

Eco Soil Systems presently serves about 200 residential customers in three dealerships—Kansas City, Mo.; Lincoln/Omaha, Neb.; and Grand Island, Neb. **LCI**

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Funds pumped into search for drought tolerant turf

By JAMES E. GUYETTE
Managing Editor

The development of drought resistant grasses is taking on a new importance to turf management professionals as more clients begin to request lawns that can get by with less water.

Some parts of the country, like the Southwest, face chronic water shortages, while other areas were dry as a bone this summer during the Great Drought of 1988.

The extent of turf damage

is unknown at this point because many of the varieties grown were developed since the last great drought—the dustbowl of the 1930s.

(Merion Kentucky Bluegrass was released in 1947 by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The first improved variety wasn't patented until 1964, when O.M. Scott & Sons released Windsor Kentucky Bluegrass.)

Breeders are trying to make their grasses more drought tolerant, yet the varieties must also provide a good seedhead

to be profitable, and—most importantly—they have to look good on a customer's lawn.

"The proof of the pudding is in the turf," says plant breeder Frederick B. Ledebauer, Ph.D., of Aurora, Ore. He does research for Coker's Pedigreed Seed Co. and Turf Merchants, Inc.

Developing and marketing a new grass is not easy. "Generally plant breeding is slow and difficult work," says Phil Busey, Ph.D., a turfgrass breeder at the University of

Florida.

"I believe there's no free lunch," comments John Zajac as he describes the frustrations involved in the breeding business. "You tell me that the grass never has to be watered, and I'll tell you that something else is wrong with it."

Zajac, who is president of Garfield Williamson, Inc., says a super grass might be lacking in other areas; it could be lousy in winter or spring, or it could attract diseases or insects.

And a heavy hitter in the

sun could turn into an instant lightweight once it reaches the shadows. "Some of the real good ones will fall apart when you put them in the shade," says Doug Brede, Ph.D., research director at the Jacklin Seed Co. in Post Falls, Idaho. "What yard doesn't have at least one tree on it?"

Still, improved varieties are being released. "We'll never reach the perfect grass, but we'll just try to approach it," says Prof. C. Reed Funk, Ph.D., of Rutgers University. "If we reach that goal we'd be out of a job," he jokes.

Bob Peterson of R.J. Peterson Enterprises in Hillsboro, Ore., worked with Funk on the early marketing of Falcon Tall Fescue, and he too knows the difficulties of presenting good grasses: "I should have been a weatherman—nobody cares if you're wrong."

Meanwhile, the effort continues toward finding grasses that can present a nice turf without requiring a lot of water.



Ledebauer: Turf must look good.

"Basically it's been a concern of ours for quite some time," says Virgil Meier, Ph.D., a turf researcher at O.M. Scott & Sons, Inc. "This is one of the reasons we released Chesapeake turf-type tall fescue a couple years ago. It's high on our list of priorities."

"We're always working on drought tolerance in our research," reports agronomist Michael J. McCarthy of E.F. Burlingham & Sons in Forest Grove, Ore. "We'll probably see a lot of work continue in ryegrasses."

McCarthy is acutely aware of how this year's drought has created an increased interest in reducing the demand on the nation's water resources. "Every time a fire breaks out in your backyard you become more aware of the heat."

The cost involved in maintaining a lawn promises to become a factor in selecting grass seed, McCarthy believes. "As water goes up it will put an economic pinch on it."

Peterson points out that water shortages are already having an impact, noting that some areas in Colorado have

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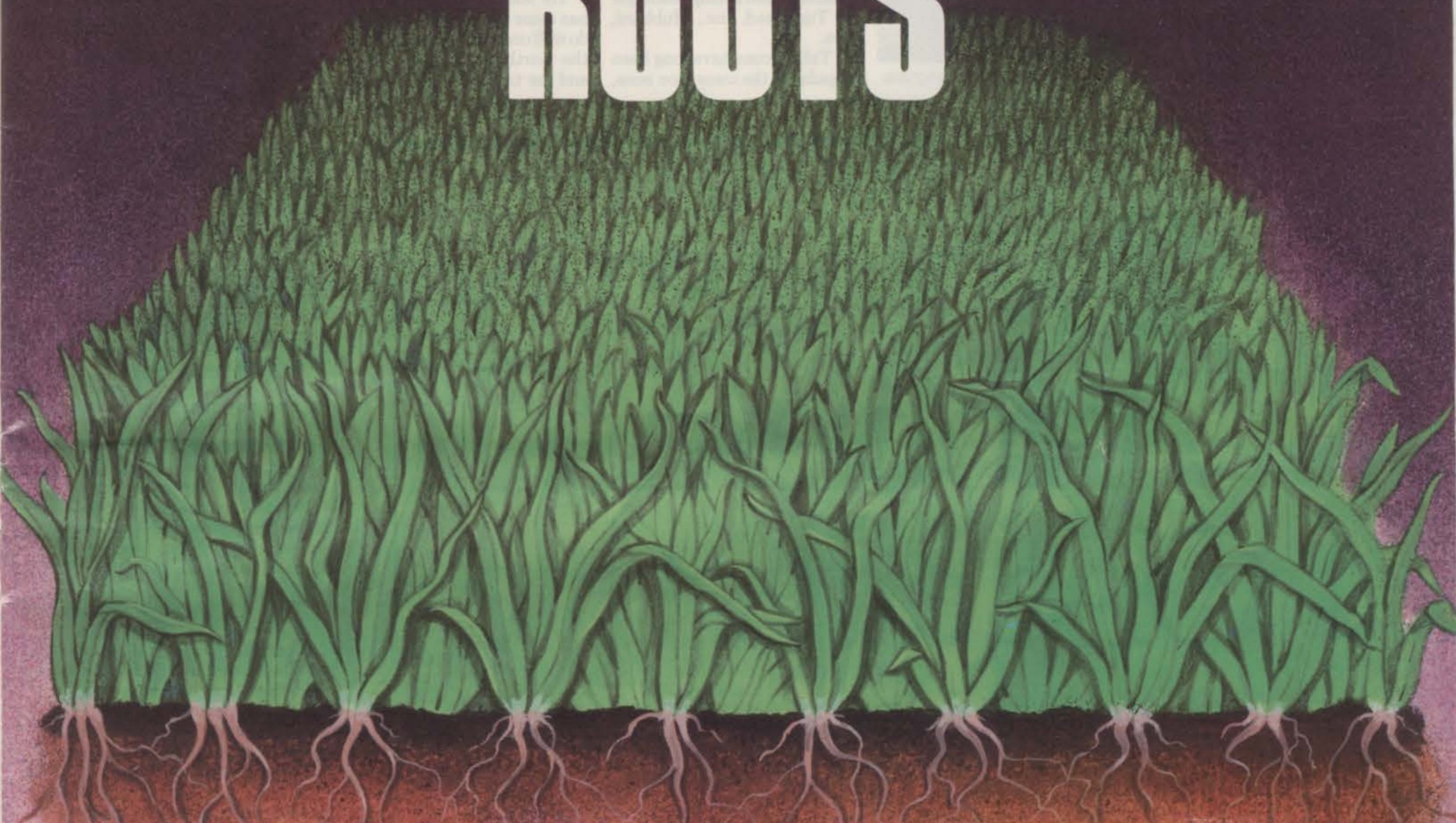
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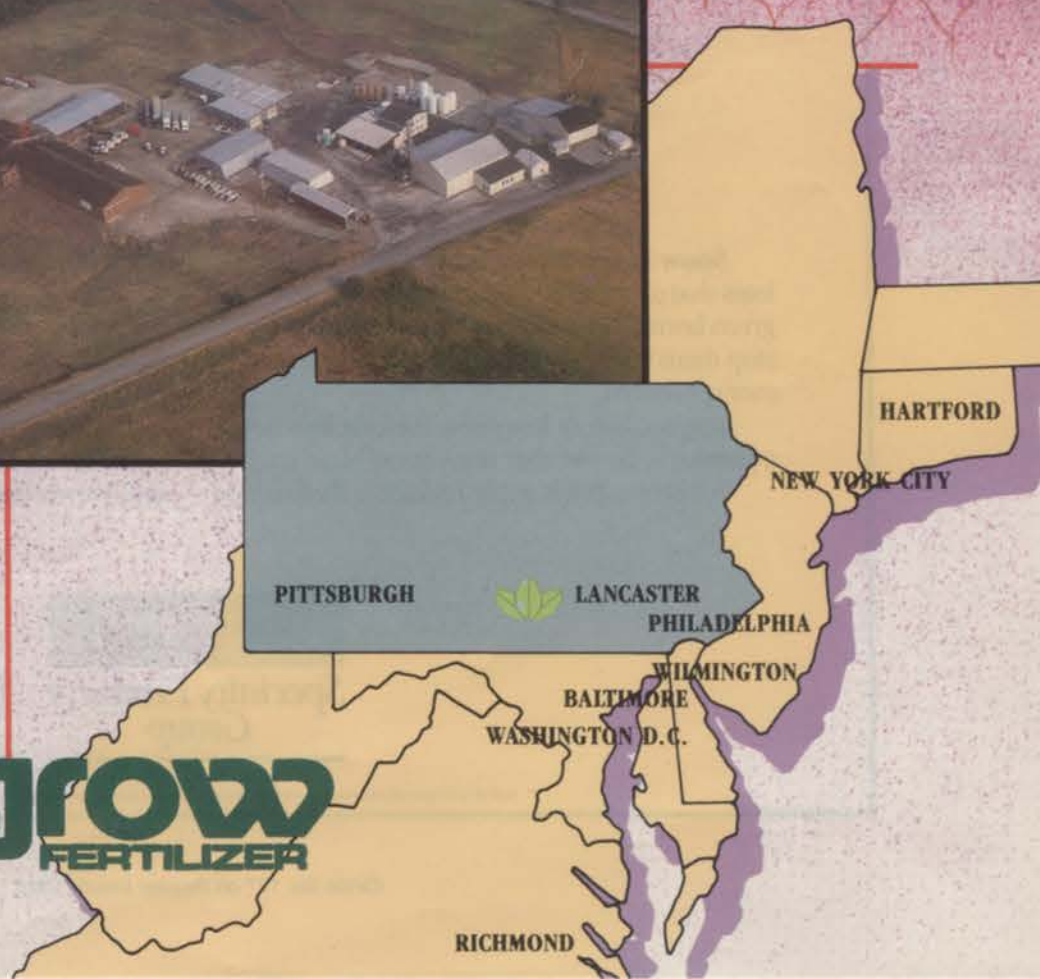
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banned the planting of bluegrass because its shorter root system requires more moisture to grow.

Tall fescues are known for their long roots, and seed experts are quite pleased with the drought tolerance.

"Your turf-type tall fescues are being used a lot more where people used to use bluegrass," says Scott Patterson, vice president at the Peterson Seed Co., Inc., Savage, Minn.

"The usage of tall fescue is really going up," agrees breeder Jerry Pepin, Ph.D., of Pickseed West, Inc., in Tangent, Ore. "It's eating into bluegrass. You can use them where bluegrass doesn't do the



McCarthy: Looking at ryegrass.

job."

"The improved turf-type tall fescues will certainly give you the ability to have a beautiful turf throughout the entire growing season," observes Funk at Rutgers.

"There's some fantastic tall fescues," agrees agronomist John DeNatteo of Lofts, Inc.

"I think we'll see tall fescues replacing some bluegrasses and ryegrasses in renovation mixes—we're going to see tall fescues enter that market," reports Tom Stanley, marketing manager at Turf-Seed, Inc., Hubbard, Ore.

Tall fescues have long been popular in the transition zone,

but some varieties are being accepted in areas with harsher climates.

"Cold hardiness is not a problem with tall fescues, and that's why they're moving up north," says Stanley.

"In cool season grasses fescues are the answer," says Mike Robinson, president of Seed Research of Oregon, Inc.

"We have more and more people using ryegrass as well," points out Mark Grundman, turf specialist at Northrup King.

He adds that his company has some bluegrasses that will do well under dry conditions in the northern United States and the transition zone.

According to Richard Hodnicky, assistant manager of the lawn seed department at the Vaughn Seed Co., tall fescues are better suited for a backyard that may see a lot of foot traffic. "In a person's front yard they may want to stick with a bluegrass."

A number of seed experts maintain that tall fescues are acceptable for a customer who wants a drought resistant turf, but bluegrasses and ryegrasses are still the best looking.



Brede: Check out the shade.

That may change, however, as breeding techniques advance. "Probably in the next five years there will be tall fescues that will compete with bluegrass in appearance," predicts Craig Edminster, director of research at International Seeds, Inc., in Halsey, Ore.

That day might be closer than one might think, says Robinson. "You look at some of the photos of tall fescues and they look like bluegrass lawns," he observes.

"If you grow tall fescue the right way you can grow a very nice turf," says Robinson.

It should be dense to keep the blades from becoming too wide, but not too dense. He recommends a seeding rate of 6-8 pounds per 1,000 square



Funk: Seeking perfection.

feet.

Several experts caution contractors to avoid planting tall fescues on the basis that they require little care to be acceptable to a homeowner. That is not the case.

"If you want to market tall fescue as a low-maintenance variety you are not telling your customers the truth," says breeder Ledebor of Coker's and TMI. "You have to take care of them to make them

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look good."

Edminster concurs, adding that a contractor will have to use different cultural methods than he or she might be used to.

"You cannot manage this species like you manage bluegrass or ryegrass in Cleveland, Ohio," he says as an example.

"Some of the maintenance aspects are going to have to be adjusted accordingly," says Edminster. "It will bomb out, I assure you, if we do a poor job on this."

In regard to different care standards, he points out that a tall fescue lawn should not be



Pepin: Consider fescues.

cut too short.

In addition to altering their lawn management techniques, contractors are urged to avoid using the Kentucky 31 common variety.

The experts say you should purchase proprietary, or name-brand, fescues.

"People are foolish to use a common variety—absolutely foolish," claims Zajac at Garfield Williamson.

"It would give tall fescue a bad name," says Robinson when discussing the common variety.

He believes it is inferior, and so does McCarthy at Burlinghams. K-31 is expected to be more expensive this year because of drought damage to the crop, but normally it's cheaper than the proprietary types. Says McCarthy: "You get what you pay for."

(In June the wholesale cost of K-31 nearly doubled as it became apparent that the Missouri/Kansas harvest would be way off. Also, some farmers have driven up the demand by planting K-31 as a forage grass in place of the ruined corn crop, according to Art Wick, vice president of research and development at LESCO, Inc., in Rocky River, Ohio.)

The K-31 can be appropriate for some applications with the customer's permission, says Mike Bailey, president of Super Lawns of Gaithersburg, Inc., in Maryland.

He seeds it at a heavy rate on large Washington-area estates where the owners will accept a low-maintenance grass. Bailey says it will stand up to the rigors of "pool parties, concerts, deer and horses" that one might find in the nation's capital.

According to the Oregon Fine Fescue Commission, fine fescues have the most shade tolerance and the lowest fertilizer and moisture requirements of any cool season grasses. Fine fescues are also used for overseeding Bermudagrass lawns during southern winters.

At Van Der Have Oregon, Inc., "We market quite a bit of hard fescue in Canada," reports General Manager T.R. Skogley. "They're much better from a winter-hardy standpoint."

Hard fescues are generally the most expensive of the fescues, Skogley says. "You have to pay a premium (to the

grower) to get it produced."

Usually a hard fescue seed production field does not last as long as other varieties. "We like to think of a three-year program and that's it," Skogley explains, adding that the seed yield decreases each year.

Dwarf tall fescues that require reduced mowing levels are attracting a lot of attention from turf researchers.

One question that needs to be resolved by breeders is whether the long roots become shorter as the blades become smaller.

"There's no evidence that tall fescue can hold onto its stress tolerance as we make it

smaller," says Jacklin's Brede.

"We believe that tall fescues should be stress tolerant," observes Brede. "That's what made it popular and that's the way it should stay."

Sometime next year Lofts is expected to release Rebel Junior dwarf tall fescue. "There is some loss of drought tolerance in using dwarf fescues," says agronomist DeNatteo. He adds that although the roots are smaller, "It's still better than ryegrass or bluegrass. It's a minor problem."

The Cascade International Seed Co. in Salem, Ore., is working with Jonathan Green and Rutgers' Funk toward developing a lower-growing tall

fescue, according to Irv Jacob, Cascade's president.

The unnamed JG-37 variety comes from the North, where the days are longer than in the South. When the grass is moved to the South, it is tricked into low-growth, Jacob explains.

"They're not a dwarf plant," he continues, "but they (the blades) elongate more slowly because they want a longer day and they don't get it."

Funk used the same idea when he developed Nugget Bluegrass, which originally came from Alaska.

"There is this differential response to daylight." LCI



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Circle No. 126 on Reader Inquiry Card

Preventing long-term drought damage

By ANTHONY J. KOSKI

Throughout many areas of the country, July rains brought relief and "new life" to dormant, drought-stricken lawns. The incredible ability of these turfs to recover and resume "normal" growth has made the 1988 drought nothing more than a bad memory in the minds of many homeowners and LCOs.

However, careful thought about the workings of the turfgrass plant, as well as of those pests affecting the quality of lawns, might lead one to speculate about future, long-term effects of the recent drought on lawns.

Effects on the turfgrass plant

The recuperative ability exhibited by these recovering lawns is testimony to the fact that the grass plant can and does store nutrients and energy reserves for use in recovering from stress and injury.

It is possible, however, that the amount of energy expended during recovery has left the surviving turfgrass plants dangerously low in reserves as the fall and winter months approach.

Any further stresses inflicted during this fall, such as those caused by scalping, insect/disease damage, nutrient deficiencies, fertilizer burn, pesticide misapplication, or even another drought event, could totally deplete energy stores and result in substantial turf loss.

Even more far-reaching is the potential for damage resulting from a very dry and/or cold winter and the capacity for the turf to recover from such damage during next spring.

It is essential that proper cultural practices, including late-season fertilization, sensible mowing, and adequate fall irrigation be instituted this fall in order that the turfgrass plants can accumulate energy stores and enter the winter in as good condition as possible.

The green and healthy appearance of recovered turf can also be misleading if one considers the possible effects of the drought on root growth. It is quite likely that root death was severe during the drought.

Although new roots are produced during recovery, the depth and mass of roots under drought-affected turf areas this fall in all probability will be less extensive than if the turf had not been drought-stressed.

A turf with a less extensive root system will be the first to be adversely affected by excess thatch, soil compaction, nutrient deficiencies, and saline conditions.

Fall core cultivation can improve water and air movement into thatchy turfs or compacted soils. The cultural practices mentioned above to encourage the accumulation of energy stores in the plant will also promote healthier, more extensive root growth.

Pest-related problems

As is obvious to all LCOs, insect populations can vary considerably from year to year. Some insects, such as chinch bugs, sod webworms and armyworms appear to

flourish under hot, dry conditions.

At present, it is difficult to impossible to predict future insect problems based on present or near past populations and weather conditions. It is likely that other factors, besides climatic conditions, are also important in determining if and when insect populations peak.

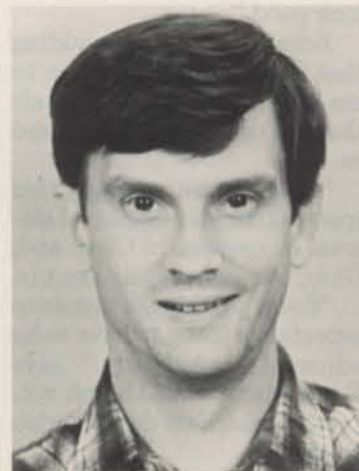
Nevertheless, it is important to remember that a weakened turf can be damaged more quickly and visibly, and by fewer insects than a vig-

orous, healthy turf. Therefore, LCOs should pay special attention to the presence of insect pests on turf that is recovering from the drought.

This attention should extend at least until next spring, since the turf areas that they will be dealing with may still be in a weakened state.

Insect populations which would be considered to be of little concern on a vigorous turf during a normal year could cause significant damage to a weakened turf.

Weed problems are some-



About the Author
Anthony J. Koski, Ph.D., is assistant turfgrass professor at Colorado State University.

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mind that comes with knowing CHIPCO® SEVIN® brand SL is also widely used for the control of mites, ticks, and fleas on poultry, pets, and game birds.

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what more easily predicted, based on the past history of specific sites. In general, however, one would expect more frequent and/or severe weed problems as a result of the drought. One reason is that a thin, weakened turf is more susceptible to weed invasion than a healthy, competitive turf.

Unless the competitiveness of drought-injured turf is enhanced this fall by proper fertilization and timely irrigation, the incidence of winter annuals (chickweed, henbit, some oxalis and speedwell species) could be expected to be of greater importance.

If this weakened condition

Renovation of drought-damaged lawns will likely be a common occurrence this fall.

is carried over into next spring (or is exacerbated by a severe winter), perennial weeds and the summer annual grasses and broadleaves will be more of a problem at that time.

A second reason that drought conditions may increase weed problems is related to efficacy of herbicides applied to prevent or control weeds. The failure of pre-emergence herbicides during the past summer would not be

unexpected if sufficient rainfall/irrigation to get the herbicides into the germination zone was not provided.

Germination and growth of summer annuals (such as crabgrass, foxtail, goosegrass, spurge) can sometimes be stimulated by timely rainfall which is too light to activate pre-emergence herbicide activity.

They can grow and reproduce under the hot and dry

conditions which force cool-season grasses to become dormant, thus creating a reservoir of new seed to fuel next year's weed problems.

Similarly, postemergent herbicides applied to weeds growing under droughty conditions are often only marginally effective.

Thirdly, deep-rooted perennial weeds such as bindweed and Canada thistle will thrive in a dormant turf. Dry conditions do not greatly affect these species since they can extract water from very deep portions of the soil.

Aside from timely herbicide applications, one of the most effective ways to keep weeds of

this type in check is to maintain a vigorous, competitive turf.

Establishment related problems

Renovation of drought-damaged lawns will likely be a common occurrence this fall. Newly-seeded lawns will almost certainly have their share of winter annual weed problems.

Proper mowing, fertilization and irrigation to encourage the turf to fill in voids as these weed species die in the spring will often suffice in lieu of herbicide use. Annual grassy weeds are often a problem on lawns that were established (from sod or seed) the previous fall.

When considering pre-emergence herbicide use on turf established the previous fall, the user should be aware of all label restrictions for the use of individual products on young turf.

Drought-weakened turf which enters the winter in apparently good condition might be killed in some areas by severe winter conditions. This would necessitate springtime renovation of dead areas.

Establishment of turf during this time narrows the choices of preemergent and postemergent herbicides available for use by the LCO on young turf.

Drought's effect on the customer

This fall, and throughout next season, be ready to address customer concerns regarding the possibility of another drought and accompanying water restrictions. Those establishing new lawns will likely be interested in the use of species, such as the turf-type tall fescues, which can more successfully avoid the effects of drought.

This can also be an ideal time to reinforce in the customer's mind those practices under their control which encourage vigorous turfgrass growth, including:

- 1) Proper mowing height and frequency for the turfgrass species in question, and 2) irrigating according to species requirement and local soil conditions.

Be prepared for changes in watering habits of customers. Some may overwater with the mistaken notion that they are "storing" water in the event that another drought may occur.

At the other extreme, those relying on their own wells as an irrigation source may be justifiably reluctant to water their lawns, especially if the wells have not recharged significantly by next spring.

It is important that the LCO educate the customer regarding possible effects of too much or too little water on fertilizer use efficiency as well as pre-emergent herbicide efficacy.

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RHÔNE-POULENC AG COMPANY

DROUGHT

from Page 1

Wis. "Here you have an opportunity to sell a serious lawn renovation."

Kujawa compares the situation to a car that's been in a wreck: It's often better to paint the whole thing now, rather than trying to merely touch-up the worst spots.

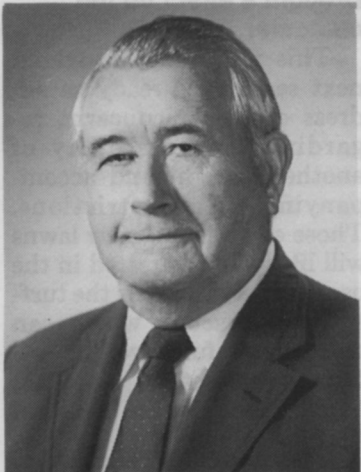
"You have to be creative with this," Kujawa stresses.

Renovations can be a big money producer. "They are definitely profitable for commercial operators," maintains Bob Moses, president of CTL Corp. in Council Grove, Kan. Success depends, though, on whether the service "is promoted and priced correctly," Moses says.

However, contractors are warned to avoid "biting off more than they can chew" when seeking renovation work. "To diversify like that you have to have good support personnel," explains Mike Bailey, president of Super Lawns of Gaithersburg, Inc.

"You have to anticipate following through automatically or you will not get the results that you and the customers expect."

Bailey says that 99 percent of his properties get renovated each fall because he includes that service, if needed, in the yearly contracts.



Watson: Ring doorbells.

"That's part of what I sell," he says. "That's the chance I take."

Extremes in the climate do not bother Bailey. "It tends to increase my business," he says, citing a growth rate of about 30 percent over each of the last three years.

"This is the third year of drought," Bailey points out. (His business is in the Washington, D.C. area.) "I'm getting used to it—and so are the lawns. It's amazing what a grass plant can do, especially these turf-type tall fescues."

Bailey plants a lot of fescue lawns, and he suggests other contractors consider them if the climate is right. "It creates a special market because people are getting fed up with all these different grasses. I really feel strongly about that grass being the grass of the future—replacing bluegrass in home lawns."

Everyone seems to be in agreement that the best time of year to do renovations is in the fall—not the spring.

"The competition from annual weeds in the spring is a tough thing to deal with," says John Hopko, turfgrass specialist at Northrup King.

Also in the spring you have varying soil and air temperatures, and any bare ground is subject to heavy rain and erosion, plus the summer heat comes too quick: "June and July can get very stressful and that plant is still very young at this point," Hopko states.

Water still promises to be a major player in the health of lawns this fall. "Some way or another they're going to have to get some moisture on it," says Watson at Toro. If you live in a northern climate, do it this month.

"Make certain that your lawn goes into the winter months with adequate moisture in the soil—even if you do nothing else," Watson urges.

"A 10-day drizzle would solve a lot of it," reports Earl J. Crane, owner of Earl J. Crane, Inc., & Associates in Tiffin, Ohio.

Using a hydraulic seeder can help guarantee that enough water gets on the turf, plus it can save time and money, according to Neil Reinecker, vice president of sales and marketing at Reinco, Inc., Plainfield, N.J.

(Other makers of hydraulic seeders include Finn, Hydro-turf and Bowie.)

"One of the advantages is that while you are seeding you are also watering," he says.

Wetting agents, fertilizer and lime can also be put down. "You can apply all the amendments in one spray application," Reinecker says. He adds that it costs about 2 cents per square foot, including materials, to operate the unit made by his company.

To prepare the ground "you should scratch the surface of the soil," Reinecker points out.

Contractors are cautioned not to get carried away with site preparation. "Most people think they have to tear the hell out of it," says Watson.

"Severe dethatching would be the wrong approach," Watson adds. "If you start tearing it up you're going to do more damage than good."

One disadvantage to too much digging is that weed seeds and other undesirable materials could be brought to the surface.

Kujawa likes using a tiller made by Deere & Co. "It's really slick," he explains. "The tines are L-shaped so they don't dig very much. Set properly, you can just till the top one-fourth inch to one-half inch of soil."

Slitseeders, or seeder-slicers, are valuable tools to have on hand, according to the experts.

"I think the only adequate way to get that seed in there is to slice it in the ground," says Jeff Mack, vice president of equipment at LESCO, Inc., Rocky River, Ohio. "You have to open up the soil to get it in there by slicing it in."

Mack's company is marketing a new Turf Renovator machine that functions as a dethatcher, slicer or slicer-seeder. Such a device results in the contractor "re-inoculating the thatch with micro-organisms," he says, "the micro-organisms help decompose the thatch."

OMC Lincoln/Cushman-Ryan is introducing a new product that combines power raking, dethatching and overseeding. The "same pass" unit is called the Ryan Mataway Overseeder, and the seeds are planted via clear plastic tubes that allow the operator to keep close tabs on the job at hand.

The machine has a disk blade that opens a furrow. "The disc rolls it (the seed) down into the ground," says



Mack: Attack the thatch.

the company's Bob Brophy.

Brophy observes that when broadcasting seed, a 30 percent germination rate is considered good. That figure jumps to 80 percent when a power seeder is used.

"For the seed they're wasting they can go buy a piece of equipment that will do the job right," Brophy points out.

The Feldmann Engineering and Manufacturing Co., Inc., Sheboygan Falls, N.Y., is producing a machine that includes "everything in one," according to Vice President Myrtle Feldmann. A 25-inch swath makes the device easy to move through gates, and it functions as a soil scarifier, sod slicer, aerator, plugger or tiller.

(When buying equipment check with your local dealer, but some other manufacturers of turf renovation tools in-

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If you are interested in obtaining any available or additional editorial information research or reference materials published in this or previous issues, please direct your inquiries to Kathleen Maciuszko at (216) 826-2839, ext 839.



Bailey: Aboard the Seeding Combine made of stainless steel by his company; it aerates, slices, seeds, fertilizes, sprays and rolls.

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(Also, keep in mind other pieces of equipment that you might need, such as vacuums, mulchers, spreaders, etc.)

Is it a good idea to rent or lease, or should these assorted machines be purchased?

"You've got to sit down and say, 'What am I paying now for rentals and what am I missing (in regard to renovation opportunities),' suggests George Kinkead, marketing sales director at Turfco Manufacturing, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn. If you decide to buy, "the unit should pay for itself in a year."

Monsanto's Roundup is playing an increasing role in renovation projects.

It is particularly useful on lawns that require only spot treatments, says Steve Bizon, president of the Bizon Main-



Bizon: Use Roundup.

tenance Co. in Wilsonville, Ore.

"It's a good way to spray out the bad grasses and put in additional seed," Bizon states. "You wouldn't commonly spray out the whole lawn, but we have done that."

Bizon warns against tackling a lawn that is too far gone, or that has a severe thatch problem. "Be sure that the lawn is salvageable before you try to salvage it," he says. "If it's that bad you should cut the lawn out and re-sod."

The company charges \$25 an hour for renovation work, and the costs are estimated at 6 cents to 10 cents per square foot.

Bizon reports that the Roundup can be applied, say, at 8 a.m., and by 9 a.m. the seed can be applied. "You don't have to wait for the lawn to die before you seed. The grass comes right back in."

Monsanto, however, recommends that a longer waiting period (at least three days) be followed before disturbing the weeds and grasses.

Using a chemical renovation method with Roundup can save a contractor money in equipment overhead, according to David L. McLaughlin, marketing communications manager for industrial products at Monsanto. The company makes an excellent slide presentation describing recommended renovation techniques.

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America has a video available that takes a detailed look at aeration. The program was made by Sal Rizzo, president of Salsco, and he reports that contractors are "buying the tape and plugging it into the customer's VCR" when making sales presentations. A booklet also is available. LCI

Stalford returning to seed farming

HALSEY, ORE.—Harry Stalford, the well-known product manager at International Seeds, Inc., is leaving the seed marketing business to become a grower again.

"I'm going back to the farm," says Stalford.

"It sounds kind of crazy to be out in 105 degrees, but I grew up on a farm—I feel more comfortable on a farm." LCI

CUSTOMER RETENTION

Profit Opportunity For The 90's





Elliot Maras

As editor of *LAWN CARE INDUSTRY* magazine, Elliot Maras has visited with hundreds of LCOs from coast to coast in the last two years. He is a frequent conference speaker, addressing industry trends and dealing with the media.

Introduction

Professional lawn care is at a crossroad. As it enters its second decade as a nationally-recognized service, it emerges from its fast-growth stage to a slower-growth stage. Marketing takes on a different meaning.

In a fast-growing industry, companies work at trying to reach the new customer. They look for ways to sell the benefits of their service to consumers who have never received it.

But when the pace of customer acquisition slows, the astute manager takes a closer look at how his service is perceived by existing customers. Marketing no longer simply refers to selling the company's service to new customers, but to existing customers as well.

Do your customers think that all lawn care companies are the same? Are your technicians prepared to answer questions customers are most likely to ask? Is there a plan in place for measuring customer satisfaction?

LCOs that answer "no" to the first question and "yes" to the other two will have the lowest rates of customer attrition. They will sustain high profitability in the face of rising costs and a more competitive market.

But let's face it—building customer loyalty isn't easy. Customers today are being solicited by more lawn care companies than ever. They are also being bombarded with reports questioning the safety of lawn pesticides.

The Dow Chemical Co. has taken a careful look at how LCOs establish trust among their customers.

There are many things they can do to build this trust, but the one LCOs cite most frequently is providing effective weed control.

A Dow study showed that 25 percent of all service cancellations were due to poor weed control, making it the greatest cause of

Marketing no longer simply refers to selling the company's service to new customers, but to existing customers as well.

customer loss next to customer relocation.

LCOs cited three steps to combat this problem: 1) Customer education: fostering more realistic expectations among customers; 2) Better training of employees; and 3) Selection of more effective products.

Programs designed to accomplish these objectives require a significant investment of time and/or money.

On the operations end, the LCO must keep abreast of the new developments in weed, insect and soil science research. On the business side, he needs better information management systems to identify service problems.

All of these areas are fully addressed in the pages that follow.

Regulatory requirements such as pre-notification, customer contracts and worker training documentation will augment the implementation of these systems in many states.

The investment will pay off—in stronger customer loyalty.

Elliot Maras

Improving Your Bottom Line

Returning to your customer's lawn to diagnose a problem and retreat that lawn can cost you time, money and revenue opportunity, and may even lead to a cancellation of service.

Current estimates indicate that 10 to 12 percent of your total customer base will call you back at one time or another about a problem, usually due to poor weed control. And industry wide, the customer cancellation rate has increased over the past 10 years from 15 percent to as much as 35 percent.

What are the reasons for those cancellations?

A survey sponsored by the Dow Chemical Co. found that about 25 percent were prompted by poor weed control.

Only customer relocation—an uncontrollable factor—ranked higher on the list of reasons for cancelling.

The problem of growing consumer dissatisfaction is significant, but it can be overcome.

What can you do to reduce your callbacks and cancellations?

- Know your costs of doing business and acquiring new customers.

- Use quality equipment and application techniques.

- Know how your products work and how given climatic and agronomic conditions will affect the way they work. The use of premium herbicides and insecticides also improves customer retention. The actual cost is less than you might think.

- Train your technicians to provide the best possible service. A key to fewer callbacks, experts say, is how well that initial application is put down. Technicians are the heartbeat of any lawn care company.

- Educate your customers about the lawn care process because many don't really understand it. Callbacks and cancellations are sometimes caused by miscommunication or no communication. Your customers' expectations may be too high. Or perhaps they have been inadvertently misled.

A certain amount of callbacks and cancellations are inevitable in this business, but they *can* be reduced. Make sure their reduction is your top priority and you'll find that your bottom line will soon be looking better.

The information on the following pages goes into greater detail and will provide you with ideas on how to improve your customer retention efforts.

A certain amount of callbacks and cancellations are inevitable in this business, but they *can* be reduced. Make sure their reduction is your top priority and you'll find that your bottom line will soon be looking better.



Consultants Tell It Like It Is



Rudd McGary

Rudd McGary is a senior partner with All-Green Management Associates, a Columbus, Ohio-based consulting firm.

■ Is service extension one way to keep customers on board?

MCGARY: It's one way to keep them on board, but the type of extension must be focused. Be aware that the buying patterns for different services are not necessarily the same. If you simply extend for the sake of having something new, it doesn't mean you will keep the customers you have. Understand how consumers buy different services and products. I've seen some lawn care companies make the mistake of assuming that they would have the same consumer base for both lawn care and new services. This simply isn't true.

■ Why should LCOs educate consumers on what they can expect from a treatment?

MCGARY: There's an old line which says that people don't buy products, they buy products of the product. With services, they don't buy services, they buy expectations. The key is to set up the expectations so the results match those expectations. It takes trained applicators who know what is happening to the lawn and are able to explain to the consumer what the results will be. From a customer education standpoint, LCOs should avoid overstepping the boundary of the company's ability to deliver the service. Once that happens and an applicator starts to promise things that are beyond the technical capability of the company, the retention rate falls. The consumer sets expectations that are not met.

■ How can LCOs address customer expectations?

MCGARY: Customer education generally falls in the sales process which is the first communication with the company. Follow up with a call after applications have been done and ask about satisfaction and if they have any problems. By continuously asking the consumer if they're satisfied, you do two things. You continue the communication process and get rid of what's known as "post-purchase dissonance." They are buying a service that is basically invisible. When someone comes out to treat, there

are no immediate results. The consumer is wondering what he spent his money on. If you are able to communicate what is going to happen in a written or verbal form, then you have a much higher chance of matching that expectation with the results.

■ How important are follow-ups?

MCGARY: Companies that follow-up are much more successful in minimizing their cancellation rates. If you look at a basis of marketing and the ability to attract and retain customers, the retention factor will be crucial in marketplaces where you're getting more and more competition. Those companies that can retain customers are better able

Those companies that can retain customers are better able to have superior growth rates.

to have superior growth rates. They don't have to go out each year and make up for the people they lost in addition to adding new customers.

■ Is it smart to cut corners by skipping an insecticide or herbicide application to save a few dollars?

MCGARY: Only if you want to lose customers. It's not smart to do that if you're going to be in the service business. Remember you're a professional and must make sure customers receive optimum treatment. That's one of the ways to guarantee growth and profitability.

■ What is the importance of leave-behinds or other literature?

MCGARY: When you're producing a leave-behind, keep in mind it should focus on something that will happen to the consumer fairly quickly. It also can't be self serving. In other words, if it's simply a sales piece, it's not likely to be read. Very little copy should be used and it should be clear to the consumer. We often see companies with good technical people who write as if everyone had a Ph.D. in agronomics. The consumer wants to know why the lawn is not green, why there are weeds, what's going to happen. If you can explain that with leave-behinds, that is helpful. Lawn maintenance tips are helpful. It is not

effective to give the customer a leave-behind only once. It takes several times to get the consumer aware of the things he or she can do in order to help the company help their lawn.

■ Is a customer newsletter worthwhile?

MCGARY: If they are actual newsletters, I think they are good. We've seen too many "sales" newsletters preaching the value of the company. If you're going to do newsletters, it should be real information that is useful to them and not necessarily to you. You are setting up credibility by offering information on aspects of lawn care that you're not going to directly service. But by showing people you're interested in their whole outdoor environment, you can create a strong company image.

■ What is the importance of portraying a good image?

MCGARY: I believe it's crucial. As an industry we have to understand that people make choices not only among competing companies, but whether or not they want to do it themselves. One of the key elements in the buying process is the image we have of the company. The image doesn't necessarily match up to reality. Good companies can have bad images and bad companies can put out good images. The company image is a correlation between the communication that goes out, the communication with customers, the ability to follow up, the way your people are dressed, the way you show up on the property and the vehicle you drive. One of the key issues for any company that wants growth is to be aware that consumers do talk to each other. If they are pleased, and if that matches their personal image, then they are more likely to buy from that company, as are their neighbors.

■ Is it important to use quality chemicals, fertilizer and equipment?

MCGARY: We have done some research on whether or not the consumer knows what you are using. If you're going to use sloppy equipment, consumers will see that. The company image will be damaged. Keep in mind price is not the only variable on which people base their buying decisions. *If you're able to use materials and equipment which help to get results they are expecting, that's a big factor in your marketing plan for both growth and retention.*



Ed Wandtke
Ed Wandtke is a senior partner with All-Green Management Associates, a Columbus, Ohio-based consulting firm.

■ **Do you feel the lawn care industry is maturing?**

WANDTKE: The fact that the industry is maturing is evident by the slowing down of growth throughout the industry. During the past 10 to 15 years, compound growth rates of 20 to 25 percent have been normally achieved by most companies. Currently we are seeing the growth decreased to 5 to 10 percent compound growth. Near maximum penetration has been achieved in the major markets and the balance of the markets to be penetrated—mainly small volume markets—result in much lower growth rates when you look at the industry as a whole.

■ **Is marketing for new customers becoming more expensive?**

WANDTKE: *The cost to obtain a new customer is approximately \$70.* We expect that to continue to rise since customers are getting smarter. They are asking for more estimates and consequently LCOs will run more estimates than in the past and close at a lower rate. Sales closing rates in the past had been running at about 90 percent of the quotes made, but now that's been reduced to about 60 to 75 percent.

■ **What problems does that present for LCOs?**

WANDTKE: When the industry was growing, management and operating inefficiencies were hidden by growth. As growth subsides, better management practices are needed. More attention needs to be placed on profitability. When the opportunity to grow from the attraction of new customers slows, as it has in the past three years, a company needs to refocus its attention even more actively on retaining current customers. The customer you have really wants to stay. He's generally willing to change only if you fail to deliver what you promised.

■ **What is the industry average cancellation rate?**

WANDTKE: Based on more than 10 years experience in the lawn care industry, *I've seen cancellations increase from*

15 percent in the early days to about 35 percent today. This reflects a higher level of consumer dissatisfaction with the quality of service and many other factors that were not evident in the early years of the industry.

■ **What are the common reasons for customer cancellations?**

WANDTKE: Some key reasons for cancellation are uncontrollable and include relocation and death of the property owner. Cancellations occur because the agronomic program being delivered may not meet the needs of that market. It's been diluted by reducing the quantity of nitrogen being delivered or using cheaper, ineffective herbicides and in-

The customer you have really wants to stay. He's generally willing to change only after you fail to deliver...

secticides. As you cut costs on materials, the results that the homeowner sees start to be less different than prior to the application, and consequently, a homeowner may cancel because he isn't satisfied with the program. Customers also cancel due to better marketing by another company. Firms seeking new accounts ask the customer using another company what they need and then come back and market their service based on those findings. When the service is perceived as too expensive for the benefit received, some customers cancel. After servicing a lawn three or four years, it's difficult to show visible improvement in color. And so, customers cancel because they feel they no longer need that firm.

■ **What is the importance of customer losses on the bottom line?**

WANDTKE: *It costs approximately two times the price of retention to attract a new customer. The cost of attracting a new customer is roughly \$70, whereas the cost of retention is about \$35 a customer.*

■ **Explain the importance of accurately tracking customer losses.**

WANDTKE: To identify the areas of market being serviced. To identify a technician or route which has constant customer service problems. To track the reason for cancellations. To identify

areas where satisfaction with the company is high. To identify areas where technician turnover and high customer turnover is occurring. That will allow you to see if there is a correlation between employee and customer turnover.

■ **How would you suggest LCOs monitor customer losses?**

WANDTKE: There are many computer programs that summarize customer cancels by week and by month, indicating the number of cancels and reasons for cancels. Programs summarize cancels by technician and by geographical area. Such programs are available from many computer firms. LCOs who are not computerized now should consider the benefits of this type of information when making their decision to buy a computer.

■ **What do you suggest as a follow-up when a customer cancels?**

WANDTKE: When the call is received by the office, I'd recommend someone return the call to confirm the reason for the cancel. In addition, some are finding it sufficient to mail out confidential questionnaires to people who have canceled and ask them to provide candid information on the quality of service, technician, and reason they left.

■ **What effects do callbacks have on customer retention?**

WANDTKE: Customers are forgiving of mistakes. One callback a year will not irritate a customer enough to cancel. But increases above that level and the customer starts to doubt the effectiveness of the company service program. Either the products are not adequate or the technicians do not know what they're doing in servicing a property. *Multiple callbacks will generally be irritating enough to a customer to result in a cancellation either this year or probably right after the first application the following year.*

■ **How long must a new customer be on the books before the LCO realizes a profit?**

WANDTKE: In four-application markets, three should result in a break-even cost for attracting a new customer. In five-application markets or more, after about 3.8 applications have been performed the costs to attract the customer will be recovered.



There's an easier way to stop surface feeding insects.

It's called DURSBAN® turf insecticide. Not as satisfying, perhaps, as batting the bugs with a polo mallet—but a whole lot more effective.

Broad-spectrum control that lasts. DURSBAN insecticide is the most efficient way to control surface-feeding turf insects. It's labeled for use against a broad spectrum of pests that attack turf, ornamentals and shade trees. And its residual power keeps them under control for weeks. No wonder it's the favorite of leading LCOs across the country.

Part of the "hit list!" DURSBAN is particularly effective against billbugs, chinchbugs, sod webworms, cutworms and armyworms, among others. And because

it bonds tightly to turf as soon as it dries, DURSBAN stays where it's applied. Won't wash away with rain or sprinkling.

Packaging options. DURSBAN turf insecticide is available as an emulsifiable concentrate in 2.5 gal. plastic jugs and 55 gal. drums. If you prefer a wettable powder, you can get the same efficacy in DURSBAN 50W, now offered in water soluble packets, pre-measured for the simplest, quickest mixing ever.

Why horse around? Control surface feeding insects the easy, sure way. With DURSBAN turf insecticide. Talk to your distributor today.

DURSBAN®
TURF INSECTICIDE



Attention: Always read the label before use and carefully follow all label directions and precautions.



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Analyzing and Identifying Actual Costs

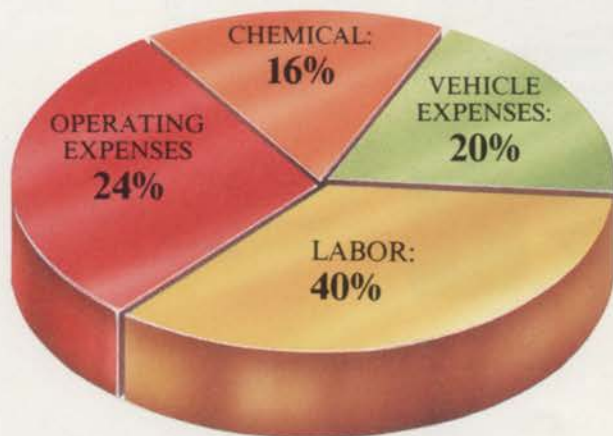
■ HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS PER CALLBACK

	Example	Your Figures
A. Total Customers	1,000	_____
B. Production Labor	\$ 68,000	_____
C. Chemicals	\$ 27,200	_____
D. Vehicle Expenses	\$ 34,000	_____
E. Operating Expenses	\$ 38,400	_____
F. Total Expenses = (Line B+C+D+E)	\$170,000	_____
G. Total Regular Applications (1,000 Customers/4 applications each)	4,000	_____
H. Callbacks (8%)	+ 320	_____
I. Total Stops = (Line F+G)	4,320	_____
Cost Per Callback (Line F divided by Line I)	\$39.35	_____

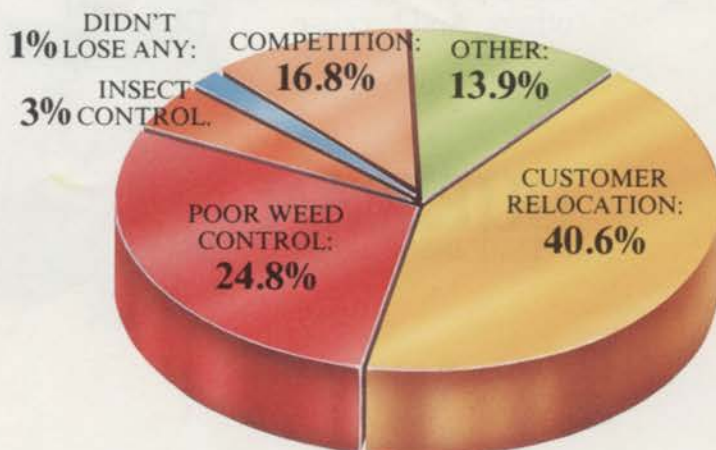
■ HOW TO CALCULATE LOST REVENUE DUE TO CANCELLATIONS

	Example	Your Figures
A. Total Customers	1,000	_____
B. Cancellations (15%)	150	_____
C. Revenue Per Customer	\$ 160	_____
D. Revenues Lost (Line B × C) =	\$24,000	_____

■ BREAKDOWN OF TYPICAL OUT-OF-POCKET CALLBACK COSTS



■ REASONS FOR CUSTOMER LOSS BASED ON A SURVEY OF LCOs



■ THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF REDUCING CALLBACKS AND CANCELLATIONS

Example: An LCO with 4,000 customers. During the year, 600 (15%) of those customers are lost due to cancellations. And, of the 16,000 applications (4 per customer) callbacks totaled 1,600 (10%).

Here's what happens if the LCO can cut those percentages by one-third.

	<u>Current</u>		<u>If Reduced by 33%</u>
Callbacks	1,600		1,065
Cost Per Callback	× \$40		× \$40
Total Cost	\$64,000		\$42,600
Savings of		\$21,400	

	<u>Current</u>		<u>If Reduced by 33%</u>
Cancellations	600		400
Cost to Replace Customer	× \$70		× \$70
Total Cost	\$42,000		\$28,000
Savings of		\$14,000	

■ COST OF OBTAINING A NEW CUSTOMER

(IT COSTS \$70 TO REPLACE A LOST CUSTOMER)



Employee Training



"The applicator needs to know the life cycles of common weeds..."

D. Bywalec



"Periodically ...we discuss each product's safety data sheets."

S. Leisring



"Training is upgraded depending on the tenure and experience of the employee."

J. Winland

LCOs agree that well trained, satisfied employees increase customer satisfaction and ultimately reduce callbacks and cancellations. Job training gives employees a greater sense of worth and professionalism and the satisfaction of a job done well.

In an industry where employee turnover is a constant concern, an analysis of the effectiveness of training programs is more important than ever. Industry leaders surveyed for this special supplement provide insight on training practices they use and the results when training is put to the test.

Jim Wilkinson
Consultant
North Kingstown, R.I.

Owners and managers oftentimes lose sight of the fact that if employees are trained correctly, it makes everyone's job much easier. The number of callbacks is decreased considerably. Some of the callbacks would not have been necessary if the job had been handled correctly the first time out. The most important thing we do in our business is training employees to handle problems on the spot. This even applies to the person answering the phone. When the phone call comes in and the question can be answered right then and there, service calls are reduced. Managers shouldn't rely on a day or week of training in the winter to carry through the year. Training should be continual, on a daily basis. Instruction should coincide with the concerns of the season. Customers' questions and problems in April differ from those in August.

Dan Bywalec
D&B Landscaping
Detroit, Mich.

Using the proper chemical at the correct time is very important in reducing callbacks. The applicator needs to know the life cycles of common weeds and how to select the right chemical to control the weeds. The importance of training for insect and disease problem identification should also not be overlooked. If the applicator doesn't have the proper, updated training on chemical use, the lawn care treatments will not be effective. Callbacks will be astronomical.

Steve Leisring
Greenlon Environmental Services
Cincinnati, Ohio

Employee safety is a high priority, comprising 20 percent of our training base. Periodically throughout the year, we discuss each product's safety data sheets. We gather information from chemical suppliers, PLCAA materials, and university specialists as well as company sources. Seasonal concerns are discussed 48 weeks out of the year, involving the staff as a team. It's our policy that customer service representatives who answer the phones are as informed about the business as the technicians. They were order takers before, but now help diagnose and solve problems. If we can answer questions and avoid a second trip, we can save money and increase our customer retention rates. We noticed a remarkable reduction in service calls simply by taking time to train our employees.

Joseph Winland
Tru Green
Alpharetta, Ga.

The applicator position is not perceived to be glamorous. It is often considered employment opportunity on the short term, thus turnover in the industry is high. It's difficult to develop a career for applicators. There needs to be efforts to change all that. This is where training can come into play. Employee retention is improved if employees are properly trained. An untrained staff member facing situations he can't handle will soon become frustrated. So training makes his job easier. New employees at Tru Green are trained in-house by the branch manager, then taken to the field with an experienced staff member for further training, the process lasting three to six weeks. They receive continuous training along with other employees on agronomics, application techniques, lawn pest identification, product safety and health. Training is upgraded depending on the tenure and experience of the employee. We very much believe it's important to have people in customer service as prepared as they can be. Proper training allows them to communicate with the customer the why's and how's of lawn care.

The Personal Touch

Catering to current customers is less costly than seeking out the elusive new buyer. These customers can be kept on board with personalized, friendly service.

In a service operation, many times customers see neither the product nor the people behind the monthly bill. Thus, customer satisfaction and retention hinges on an LCO's service, says Larry Kokkelenberg, president of the Center for Business Development in Illinois.

Effective communications and top-notch service start with employee training. Kokkelenberg suggests LCOs stress four key points for applicators to improve relations.

- Healthy attitudes and self-esteem show in the applicator's performance. If an employee is unsatisfied with his position, customer service suffers.
- Do more than the minimum for customers. Going the extra mile will help improve company image.
- Listen carefully to customers complaints and needs.
- Be attentive to customers. Friendly, courteous service will bring rewards.

It's true that the personal touch goes a long way in this business. In fact, studies have shown that customer cancellation rates rise as the business grows. The reason is a decline in personalized service, says industry consultant Rudd McGary of All-Green Management Associates in Columbus, Ohio.



"The key is how well you communicate with people and remember what it took to get you where you are," he says. "Don't start treating customers as numbers; customers remain people. Treat them as important as they were when you first started the business."

LCOs that focus on what the consumer wants rather than what the company has to offer will improve customer relations. They want a beautiful lawn, so a realistic evaluation of what the lawn might look like after treatment will give the customers reasonable expectations.

"They want to know what you're

"The key is how well you communicate with people and remember what it took to get you where you are...Don't start treating customers as numbers." LCOs that focus on what the consumer wants rather than what the company has to offer will improve customer relations.

going to do and how you're going to do it. Explain what they are going to get, not what the company wants to give them," McGary says.

Developing rapport with customers will not only get the relationship off to a good start, but will smooth out conflicts when the customer is dissatisfied with the service.

Studies have shown customers will stay with a company or applicator they care about even if they make mistakes, Kokkelenberg says.

Complainers are unpleasant, but should be handled with grace and charm. Besides, be glad those customers are complaining to the company, not to their neighbors and friends.

"Complainers are people who wish to continue doing business with you. The non-complainers just drop you and go away," Kokkelenberg says. "When calls come in, they should be handled thankfully, even if the person at the other end is swearing."

If such calls are handled quickly and to the customer's satisfaction, up to 90 percent will remain with the business. Since the cost of attracting a new customer is twice that of maintaining a customer already on the books, keeping customers happy makes good business sense.



Ideas that work

Ideas to improve customer relations are limited only by the imagination. LCOs interviewed offer suggestions on how to show customers how their money will be well spent.

▶ Try to anticipate the customer's needs and then meet those needs. Take a look at the lawn and offer all services that apply. Let the customer select which services to purchase.

▶ Do more than the minimum for the customer. Move bicycles off the lawn, take the extra time to knock on the customer's door before and following application.

▶ Use down times and rainy days to check up on customers' lawns.

▶ Mail out informative, non-selling newsletters during the off-season. This keeps the company name in the customers' minds all year long...Leave-behinds at the property can provide information on what needs to be done to maintain the lawn.

▶ Return customers' phone calls that day if possible, while the call is still fresh on their minds. Waiting to return a call after 48 hours leaves the impression the caller is not a valued customer.

UNITED
Van Lines

North Star
Van & Storage
Milwaukee, WI

MATLOCK

MATLOCK

MATLOCK

MELCHER



Some cancellations even TURFLON can't prevent.

When your customers move away from you, the best herbicide in the world can't make them stay. But when more than 24% of LCO customer losses are due to poor weed control—as cited in one recent study—then it's time to take a look at your herbicide.

TURFLON®: Superior control. For outstanding control of a wide spectrum of broadleaf weeds, there's nothing like TURFLON herbicide. It even gets the stubborn Hard to Control weeds—oxalis, ground ivy, wild violet, spurge and the like—that other herbicides often miss. So your customers stay happy... and stay with you. And you have fewer complaints, fewer costly callbacks, fewer cancellations.

New herbicide chemistry. The active ingredient in TURFLON, triclopyr, is the first new herbicide chemistry to come along in years. It stays where it's sprayed, won't migrate through soil to harm ornamentals and other off-target species.

It's safe to established cool-season turf, and has a proven safety record for humans and animals.

Proven in use. TURFLON herbicide performance has been thoroughly proven... in years of testing and in day-to-day use on LCO route trucks across the country. Operators who have used it find that often one treatment with TURFLON does what other products fail to achieve in two or more treatments.

Choice of formulations. Whatever you need, there's a TURFLON formulation for you. Choose an amine for broadcast use, or an ester for spot application. Whichever you select, TURFLON herbicide gives you outstanding performance, every time.

You can't keep your customers from moving away. But you can keep them from moving to your competition because of poor weed control. Keep them, and keep them happy, with TURFLON herbicide.

TURFLON*

Fewer weeds, fewer cancellations.



*Trademark of The Dow Chemical Company

7002

ANOTHER KEY Insect Control



Jim Wilkinson

Jim Wilkinson, a North Kingston, R.I.-based consultant, is immediate past president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America.

Those tiny creatures living in the thatch and soil of lawns can cause a lot of customer dissatisfaction. And unfortunately, the damage caused by insects is often not visible until it's too late to take corrective action.

That's why it's important to analyze the proper use of insecticides in your company's program. Poor insect control can become a costly problem in terms of callbacks and cancellations.

Rudy Zuroweste has considerable experience in this area. As the senior staff horticulturalist at Ever-Green Lawns, St. Louis, Mo., he oversees that company's insect control programs.

"Grubs are a significant problem when it comes to customer complaints and that's partially because we haven't been able to effectively control them. There's also a lack of cooperation among homeowners who don't water in the insecticide," he says.

"In addition, the damage may be masked by drought or dormancy, so by the time it's discovered there's little that can be done."

According to Zuroweste, the situation with surface feeding insects, such as chinch bugs and billbugs, is different. "Fortunately, we have insecticides like Dursban which take care of those problems with one application."

Ever-Green takes an upfront approach to insect control. The horticulturalist says the company has trained personnel who scout for insects early in the year and then prescribe appropriate treatments.

"In the six years I've been at Ever-Green, we've applied a surface feeding insecticide in five of those years. You're going to have problems nearly every year so it's important to make sure the populations of those insects are kept down in order to minimize damage."

Regional Situations

Experienced LCOs agree that you can't generalize when it comes to insect control programs. For example, consider Jim Wilkinson's situation in the New England area.

Wilkinson, who recently left Old Fox Lawn Care, East Providence, R.I. to become a private consultant, says he used an application of Dursban in the spring to control overwintering chinch bugs.

"They are a real problem in the

southern New England area and it's much better to treat them early on before the population multiplies. You must know insect life cycles in order to treat at the optimum time."

Wilkinson believes it's important to stay ahead of insect problems. "If you don't keep populations down, eventually that will result in damage to lawns and consequently dissatisfied customers. A single application of Dursban in the spring generally will prevent multiple applications later in the season."

At the other end of the country, LCO's have to watch the billbug situation. A western LCO calls the billbug a "significant problem" in markets served by its company.

"In the long run, it's much more profitable to apply the right product at the right time with the correct rates."

"Customers can get upset and cancel if this problem is not prevented. Our approach is to use a quality insecticide that is cost effective and has good residual control."

The LCO says cutting corners is not the answer. "In the long run, it's much more profitable to apply the right product at the right time with the correct rates. The cost to acquire new customers far overshadows the cost of doing the job right."

"It's important to apply the insecticide uniformly and apply it at the right rates. It's extremely important that the technicians be trained to do this. As long as we do a quality job, getting results and doing the job in a reasonable time frame, our customer retention improves."

Timing is crucial, the LCO notes. "Our applications must be done on time. They mustn't be late in the application cycle."

"If we are late on an application, or miss an area, or don't apply at the correct rate, then we'll have to go back on a service call and look at the possibility of a customer cancellation."

Remember, the LCO says: It's cheaper to apply the right product at the correct time and at the correct rate than it is to acquire a new account because the old one cancelled. "You can't cut corners or be careless. You've got to do a quality, professional job."

The Importance of Weed Control

A recent survey sponsored by the Dow Chemical Co. showed customer relocation was the number one reason why LCOs lost customers. But right behind, in second place, was unsatisfactory weed control.

Hard-to-control broadleaf weeds were the culprits—weeds such as wild violet, oxalis, spurge, ground ivy and veronica, just to name a few.

Ineffective weed control not only causes customer turnover, it is also the primary reason for service callbacks. Retreatments for hard-to-kill broadleaves was the leading cause of callbacks for two-thirds of the LCOs interviewed.

It's important to match a herbicide's performance with the weed species and the seasonal conditions to reduce those callbacks and cancellations, says Gary Clayton, technical services director for PLCAA in Marietta, Ga.

An Ohio LCO recently confirmed this by measuring the cost effectiveness of Turflon, a premium herbicide, against that of a standard herbicide. (See accompanying chart.)

The LCO treated 2,200 lawns. Using the standard herbicide, 143 callbacks were recorded. Callbacks resulting from the premium herbicide numbered 96, which was 33 percent lower than the standard product.

The LCO multiplied the number of callbacks by an average cost of \$40 apiece and determined that the cost of callbacks for the standard herbicide was \$5,720, compared to \$3,840 for Turflon.

Adding the herbicide cost to the cost of callbacks, the LCO learned that the standard herbicide actually cost him \$7,155, while the Turflon was slightly less at \$6,640.

The real kicker, though, was the impact on cancellations. He found that using Turflon reduced his weed-related cancellations by nearly 21 percent.

The LCO estimated that it cost him \$70 to attract a new customer.

He found that the actual application costs for the standard herbicide plus the cancellation costs added up to \$14,855. Doing the same for the premium herbicide, he determined that he actually paid \$12,730. So the herbicide that cost more money up front actually ended up saving the LCO money.

The lesson he learned is that it is important to look past the price tag.

Tom Harrison, assistant branch manager for Lawn Doctor of Bux-Mont in Warminster, Pa., uses Turflon II as a broadcast herbicide. "I haven't found

many weeds it can't control, so there's no reason for any of our customers to cancel because of poor weed control," he says.

Harrison found the product to be 90 to 100 percent effective on veronica, a major weed problem in his area. "We were very impressed, as were our customers. We're not getting any repeat calls from them."

Ineffective weed control not only causes customer turnover, it is also the primary reason for service callbacks.

Says PLCAA's Clayton, "It's an old equation—customer satisfaction equals good customer retention. If you use the right products at the correct times and develop an effective lawn care customer communications program, then a customer is more apt to stick with your program rather than switch to a competitor."



Measuring the Cost Effectiveness of a Premium Herbicide

	Standard Herbicide	Turflon
A. # of customers	2,200	2,200
B. Cost per Callback	\$40.00	\$40.00
C. Callbacks due to ineffective weed control	143	96
D. Cost of service callbacks (Line B × C)	\$5,720.00	\$3,840.00
E. Herbicide cost	\$1,435.00	\$2,800.00
F. Actual application costs (Line D + E)	\$7,155.00	\$6,640.00
G. # of cancellations due to ineffective weed control	110	87
H. Cost of acquiring each new customer	\$70.00	\$70.00
I. Cancellation Costs: (Line G × H)	\$7,700.00	\$6,090.00
J. TOTAL ACTUAL COST: (Line F + Line I)	\$14,855.00	\$12,730.00

Ten Ways to Improve Customer Retention

According to experienced and successful LCOs, customer retention can be summed up in three words: "good customer service." It's an ongoing process, they say, involving good communications and customer-oriented business sense.

A summary of their suggestions follows:

- ◆ Make customer retention your top priority. Obtaining each new customer costs \$70.
- ◆ Use quality equipment and products. Use of premium herbicides and insecticides pays off in the final analysis.
- ◆ Know how climatic and agronomic conditions affect the ways your products work.
- ◆ Train your technicians to provide the best possible service.
- ◆ Try to anticipate your customers' needs and then meet those needs.
- ◆ Remember that you're in a service business—be sure to listen to your customers.
- ◆ Telephone your customers soon after each application to make sure that all went well.
- ◆ Take a more personal approach. Encourage your applicators to feel responsible for everyone on their route. Ask them to ring doorbells and chat with their customers.
 - *Always return customer phone calls within 24 hours.
 - *Send your customers informative, non-selling literature during the off season.
 - *Survey all customers throughout the year.
- ◆ Know your costs of doing business. For example, callbacks cost an average of \$40 apiece.
- ◆ Develop and present a good company image.



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Now there's more to Cushman® Front Line® Mowers than top cutting performance. More power. More operator comfort. More endurance.

Now there's the new diesel-powered model Cushman 807.

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Factors in buying versus replacing equipment

To buy or replace a piece of equipment is a decision every lawn care business must face. There are no easy answers.

Replacing sooner than necessary can create dramatic increases in fixed costs. Keeping it for extended periods of time can increase operational, primarily repair, costs.

How frequently this question is faced depends upon:

• **Quality of the equipment maintenance program**—A frequent and complete maintenance program can significantly lower costs and prolong the use of essential equipment.

• **Skill of the operators**—Untrained or unskilled equipment operators drain business profits through excessive equipment repair costs and the need for early replacement costs.

• **Reliability**—How long the machine will perform satisfactorily without undue downtime because of repair and maintenance.

• **Obsolescence**—How long the equipment lasts before new products are available that will do the job quicker, better and/or at lower cost.

• **Downtime**—How much unproductive time is spent because the equipment has broken down.

• **Repair cost**—General guidelines suggest that when repair costs amount to 30 to 65 percent of the equipment's new cost, it should be replaced.

• **Financial capability**—Replacement often requires the outlay of substantial sums of capital that might not be available.

• **Capacity**—The capacity of new equipment must be compared to that of the existing equipment.

• **Safety**—If the equipment is not safe to operate, it must either be made safe or replaced, regardless of its other attributes.

The options

In evaluating equipment replacement, consider three options: 1) Continue to operate the old equipment with escalating repairs and downtime; 2) Incur a major overhaul that will restore the equipment to near normal performance for a few more years; 3) Replace it with another comparable piece of equipment.

When the projected cost of operating equipment another year is equal to or greater than the projected annual cost of its replacement, it is time to replace.

The machinery budget addressed in our June article is the appropriate management tool for evaluating equipment replacement. To fully evaluate a question of this

kind may require that a number of equipment budgets be prepared as shown in the 3/4-ton pickup truck illustration (Form 1) from the June article.

Let's assume that the busy season in year 5 of the truck has been completed and you are in the process of putting

together next year's budget. The condition of the truck is such that significant repairs will be necessary if it is to be counted on for use another year.

In Form 1, the first column contains figures that represent an average year during the 5-year life of the truck. The sec-

ond column contains cost estimates for another or extra year beyond the original or estimated life, which is represented by year 6.

It is important to note the differences in some of the costs for year 6 from those shown in the average year column.



R.K. Reynolds W.R. Luckham

About the Authors

R.K. Reynolds and W.R. Luckham are associate professor emeritus and extension marketing specialist, respectively, in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Virginia Tech.

To begin, by the end of year 5 the purchase cost less salvage (shown as cost to be recovered on line 3) has been fully recovered and is therefore excluded as a fixed cost in year 6. The salvage value (\$1400), however, would continue in existence and thus the 12 percent interest charge is also shown in year 6.

The remaining fixed costs would continue should the truck be kept an extra year. With the exclusion of the cost recovery and interest charge in year 6, the estimated total fixed cost (line 11) for one more year beyond the 5-year life is significantly lower (\$768 compared to \$4,263 for the average year).

Some differences are also likely to exist in year 6 for the variable or operating costs.

Fuel consumption was estimated to be less efficient in year 6 than was the case, on the average, during the original 5-year life. An increase in oil usage is also anticipated, thus raising this cost for year 6.

A primary cost increase in year 6 has to do with repairs. Based on the repair record information as shown below and

Form 1. EVALUATING EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT - 3/4 Ton Pickup Truck

Line	Item	Present Equipment		Replacement	
		Ave. Yr.	Extra Yr.	Alternative I (Ave. Yr.) (New Pickup)	Alternative II (Ave. Yr.) (Used Pickup)
1.	Purchase cost	\$14,000		\$16,500	\$10,000
2.	Salvage value	1,400	1,400	1,650	1,000
3.	Cost to be recovered (line 1 minus line 2)	\$12,600		\$14,850	\$ 9,000
4.	Estimated years of life	5	Year 6	5	3
5.	Estimated annual use	720 hrs. 18,000 miles	720 hrs. 18,000 miles	720 hrs. 18,000 miles	720 hrs. 18,000 miles
Fixed or Ownership Costs:					
6.	Factor for cost recovery & interest (from Table 1)	(5 yrs., 12%) .2774	XX	(5 yrs., 12%) .2774	(3 yrs., 12%) .4163
7.	Cost recovery and interest (line 3 x line 6)	\$ 3,495	XX	\$ 4,119	\$ 3,747
8.	Interest on salvage value (line 2 x 12% interest rate)	168	168	198	120
9.	Insurance, taxes, housing (line 1 x 4%)	560	560	660	400
10.	License	40	40	40	40
11.	Total fixed cost (add lines 7 through 10)	\$ 4,263	\$ 768	\$ 5,017	\$ 4,307
12.	Fixed cost per unit (line 11 ÷ line 5)	per hour 5.92 per mile .24	1.07 .04	6.97 .28	5.98 .24
Variable or Operating Costs:					
13.	Fuel (gal./hr. or mile x no. hrs. or miles x price/gal.)	\$ 1,260	\$ 1,890	\$ 1,620	\$ 1,750
14.	Oil, grease, antifreeze	150	195	175	190
15.	Repairs (incl. service labor, tires, etc.)	600	1,878	800	1,000
16.	Total variable cost (add lines 13 through 15)	\$ 2,010	\$ 3,963	\$ 2,595	\$ 2,940
17.	Variable cost (line 16 ÷ line 5)	per hour 2.79 per mile .11	5.50 .22	3.60 .14	4.08 .16
18.	Total annual equipment cost (line 11 ÷ line 16)	\$ 6,273	\$ 4,731	\$ 7,612	\$ 7,247
19.	Total cost line 18 ÷ line 5)	per hour 8.71 per mile .35	6.57 .26	10.57 .42	10.06 .40
20.	Other factors: downtime, reliability	XX	1,500	XX	XX
21.	Total cost (line 18 + line 20)	XX	\$ 6,231	\$ 7,612	\$ 7,247

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Use the backpack blower to remove debris from shrubs and hard-to-reach areas.



The suction sweeper is used for sweeping up leaves in outlying areas, away from the truck.

the need for additional major repairs should the pickup be kept another year, repairs and tires are estimated at \$1,878 for year 6 (a 75 percent increase from year 5).

tain projected annual costs for two 3/4-ton pickup replacement alternatives. With regard to the replacement shown in the Alternative 1 column, it is assumed that the purchase

keep the present 3/4-ton pickup another year since the annual cost for replacement exceeds the extra-year cost (year 6) of the present pickup by \$1,381 (\$7,612 minus \$6,231).

The estimates for Alternative 1 indicate that significant expenditure for repairs and allowance for downtime may be feasible before investing in the new replacement 3/4-ton pickup truck.

Suppose a used 3/4-ton pickup truck could be purchased as shown in Alternative 2 that would serve the business for an estimated three years. The three years estimated life at the same interest rate (12 percent) as used for Alternative 1 increases the annual fixed cost significantly.

This increase along with some anticipated increases in variable costs also reveal it may be feasible to keep the existing 3/4-ton pickup another year before replacing it with the used 3/4-ton truck.

Alternative estimate

Another approach would be to evaluate how much could be spent on repairs and downtime during the next year before it would be financially wise to invest in a new truck. The manager could then make a decision as to the chances of spending this amount of money in year 6 to keep the pickup in satisfac-

tory operation.

To determine this amount, leave lines 15 and 20 (repairs and downtime, etc.) blank, and compare the new total for the "extra year" column (\$2,853) with that of the new replacement alternative (\$7,612).

This indicates that up to \$4,759 (\$7,612 minus \$2,853) could be spent on repairs and downtime before the company would be better off buying a new truck.

Other alternatives

Other replacement alternatives could be evaluated with this procedure.

An important point to remember, however, is that if the decision is to keep the present truck another year (year 6 in the illustration), the replacement evaluation should be made again before year 7.

This is because changes can occur in the cost estimates for an additional year on the present truck as well as the replacement alternatives.

Therefore, equipment replacement should be evaluated on an annual basis or some other time period that is appropriate in the lawn care business.

The procedure outlined here provides a relatively simple process by which management can quickly evaluate several equipment replacement alternatives.

Many firms get into financial trouble because of the cash flow requirements resulting from their equipment decisions.

This systematic procedure provides the manager with the essential information needed to make sound equipment replacement decisions. **LCI NEXT MONTH**—Handling overhead costs.

3/4 Ton Pickup Truck Repair Cost - Records to Date

Year 1 = \$ 300	
Year 2 = \$ 395	32% Increase
Year 3 = \$ 517	31% Increase
Year 4 = \$ 715	38% Increase
Year 5 = \$1,073	50% Increase
\$3,000 = Ave. \$600/Yr.	

Projected for Year 6 = \$1,878

The variable costs for another year total to \$3,963 (line 16). Other factors such as reliability and downtime as described earlier must also be considered when evaluating equipment replacements.

In the illustration, management has estimated that there could be a loss of income in year 6, even with the major repairs being made, due to the truck breaking down, being out of service for repair or performing unsatisfactorily. This loss of income has been estimated at \$1,500 for year 6 (Line 20).

Therefore, with the estimates shown, the total cost to keep the present 3/4-ton pickup an extra year equals \$6,231 (Line 21).

The two remaining columns in the illustration con-

cost for a new 3/4-ton pickup is \$16,500 with a cost to be recovered of \$14,850 over five years at 12 percent interest.

This assumption, along with a 12 percent interest charge on the salvage value and other fixed costs as shown, results in a total annual fixed cost of \$5,017 (line 11).

Annual variable cost for this replacement alternative totals \$2,595 (line 16). This total is greater than that shown in the Average Year column for the present machine because of an anticipated lower fuel efficiency and higher prices for oil, grease, antifreeze and repairs.

Total cost for replacement Alternative 1 is \$7,612 (line 18). Based on the evaluation to this point, the correct management decision may be to

Annuity or Capital Recovery Table (Annuity or Capital Recovery and Interest for Each Dollar of Investment)

Year	10%	11%	12%	13%	14%
1	1.1000	1.1100	1.1200	1.1300	1.1400
2	.5762	.5839	.5917	.5995	.6073
3	.4021	.4092	.4163	.4235	.4307
4	.3155	.3223	.3292	.3362	.3432
5	.2638	.2706	.2774	.2843	.2913

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DEMAND

from Page 1

River, Ohio-based LESCO, Inc. The company is marketing a new verticutter/seeder.

"Those companies that have not diversified into seeding and renovation are really going to get blasted this year," says Lance Schelhammer, president of Grass Roots, Inc., Lenexa, Kan.

"A lot of the production you lose you can't get back," says



Gardner: LCOs gearing up.

John Hayes, president of Atlanta, Ga.-based Tru Green Corp. "You can pick up some of it, but I don't know how much." Tru Green put many of its employees on vacation in mid summer.

Don Karnes, a Tru Green regional vice president, was not optimistic. "I think it's a serious problem."

Tom Hofer, president of Spring Green Lawn Care Corp., Naperville, Ill., agrees. "We're certainly not going to have the season that was anticipated back in May," he says. He suspects billing for some of his franchises will be down 10 percent for the summer applications. "I don't think it's anything catastrophic."

Companies with the most to worry about are those in the regions that had total watering bans, such as Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Sioux Falls, S.D. Production was shut down completely for many of these companies by mid July.

"They're definitely going to show some major losses," says Roger Albrecht, president of Ft. Collins, Colo.-based Nitro-Green Corp. "It's affecting probably 25 percent of our franchises. We're going to have to take a look at some things."

Readying for repairs

The most optimistic LCOs are those that see substantial renovation work ahead. Many are investing extra dollars in verticutters and seeders.

Says Pat Norton, president of Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, Inc.: "There's going to be more work to be done than there's going to be equipment."

Lance Schelhammer of Grass Roots, Inc. notes that renovations are the most profitable services LCOs provide. (Customers in his area have received quotes ranging from \$100 to \$800 for a 5,000-

square-foot lawn.)

Don Burton, president of Bergen, N.Y.-based Lawn Medic, Inc., expects fall sales to jump 30 percent—half of which will be on account of renovations. "When you have drought, business goes up," he says. "Not during the drought, but right after."

"Historically, drought has always been a very positive factor in the industry," says Marc Sandler, president of Fairfield, N.J.-based Lawn King, Inc. "It tends to lead to the best falls in terms of new business."

Mike Bailey, president of Super Lawns of Gaithersburg, Md., intends to beef up his di-



Albrecht: It's been tough.



Hofer: Cancels were up.

rect mail advertising this fall. "Every time we get a hot, dry summer, we get more work the following fall and spring."

Some, however, wonder if the damage might have the op-

posite effect on customers.

Reid Anderson, president of Bloomington, Minn.-based Fertilawn, Inc., suspects some customers might choose to reduce rather than increase in-

vestment in their lawns. Many are aware that next summer could be as severe as this.

"It really relies on our ability to communicate," says Jerry Faulring, president of Gaithersburg, Md.-based Hydro Lawn, Inc. He also suspects some customers will be inclined to cancel if their lawns don't show good recovery next spring.

One cost of the drought that can't be measured in dollars and cents is the aggravation—of rescheduling service calls and dealing with irate customers.

"It was more of an inconvenience (than anything else)," says Jim Wheeler, vice presi-

dent of Perf-A-Lawn Corp., New Carlisle, Ohio.

"It's (been) making everybody just grumpy," says Ralph Galbraith, a contractor in Holidaysburg, Pa. LCI

Drought challenged creativity

Companies offering diverse landscape services fared better than most during the Great Drought. But it was an ongoing creative challenge—offering customers services they didn't ordinarily buy.

Companies that normally provide mowing on a per-cut basis were one step behind to begin with. None was needed while the grass wasn't growing.

"You see what else a customer might need," such as irrigation, lighting, retaining walls and new installation, says Ron Kujawa, president of KEI Enterprises, Cudahy, Wis. He worked to meet the demand for irrigation and irrigation repair.

Clarence Davids & Sons, Blue Island, Ill., found it made for good customer relations to be flexible with the service contracts. Some customers were provided irrigation instead of the mowing which wasn't being done, says Bill Davids, vice president of operations.

The company did very well with irrigation in general, Davids says, charging \$200 to \$300 a day for all-day watering. It also did irrigation repairs.

The company that made out the best of all those interviewed was Grass Roots, Inc., Lenexa, Wis., which has all commercial accounts. The extra irrigation necessitated the application of micronutrients and lime, says Lance Schelhammer, president.

Schelhammer also decided it made better agronomic sense to apply the nitrogen in smaller amounts—over more applications.

In Independence, Mo., the hot weather caused more tree insect problems. "We have been busier than ever," says Franki Jensen, co-owner, Jensen's Professional Turf Care. LCI



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- 01** Golf course
- 02** Sports Complexes
- 03** Parks
- 04** Right-of-way maintenance for highways, railroads, and utilities
- 05** Schools, colleges and universities
- 06** Industrial and office parks and plants
- 07** Condominiums/apartments/housing developments/hotels/resorts
- 08** Cemeteries/memorial gardens
- 09** Military installations and prisons
- 10** Airports
- 11** Multiple government/municipal facilities
- 13** Landscape contractors (installation and maintenance)
- 14** Lawn care service companies
- 15** Landscape architects
- 16** Extension agents/consultants for horticulture
- 18** Sod growers
- 19** Dealers, distributors
- 20** Other (please specify) _____



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Customers criticize Ever-Green

ST. CHARLES, MO.—At least 46 customers of Ever-Green Lawns Corp. have filed complaints with the St. Louis area Better Business Bureau over the company's service and sales tactics. Customers claim the company has ruined yards, harassed homeowners and lied to make sales.

In a front page article on July 10, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* reported that 46 written complaints had been filed about the company in the last year and a half with the BBB. It said 64 have been filed since 1985, more than four times that filed against any other lawn care firm.

Jim Oates, regional vice president of the firm, was quoted as saying Ever-Green was working to reduce the complaints, and that the number had fallen from 40 in 1987 to six.

The BBB issued a report several months ago warning prospective customers about the company.

"Complainants contacting the BBB allege that they were billed for work that they did not authorize," the report said. "Other complainants claim that firm continued to send bills for lawn spraying that were conducted after their contract had expired or was canceled. Also, complainants allege they were billed for lawn spraying that the firm never did."

Other lawn care companies in the area have complained that the negative press has tarnished their reputations, says Douglas Moody, assistant executive director of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America.

Ever-Green belongs to PLCAA.

Moody says the association does have a code of business ethics for its members. But it does not, as a policy, intervene in disputes between members.

Ever-Green, based in St. Louis, Mo., is owned by ADT, Ltd., formerly the Hawley Group.

Ever-Green officials did not return calls to LAWN CARE INDUSTRY. LCI

Revenue figure clarified

EDITOR'S NOTE—Worthington, Ohio-based Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, Inc. had \$30.9 million in lawn care sales for 1987. The August issue of LAWN CARE INDUSTRY incorrectly listed the revenue as \$30 million for corporate and franchise revenue in the 1988 Million Dollar Lawn Care List. LCI

Business seminars scheduled

MIDLAND, MICH.—Business management seminars by lawn care consultants Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke will be held through the winter in eight different cities. The seminars are sponsored by the Dow Chemical Co.

Topics covered will include marketing, forecasting, pricing, market segmentation, differentiation, and profit and loss analysis.

Times, dates and locations are:

Nov. 21—Bloomington, Mich., Holiday Inn, International Airport; Nov. 28—Cincinnati, Ramada Inn North; Nov. 29—Indianapolis, Holiday Inn-East; Nov. 30—Detroit, Holiday Inn Livonia; Dec. 1—Cleveland, Holiday Inn Strongsville; Dec. 2—St. Louis, Embassy Suites (North First Street); Dec. 15—Chicago, Embassy Suites, Schaumburg; Dec. 16—Omaha, Howard Johnson Motel (I-80 at 77nd Street). LCI

Equipment will be shown at PLCAA show

MARIETTA, GA.—Seminars on the use of outdoor power equipment will be part of the 9th annual conference of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, Nov. 7-10 in the New Orleans Superdome.

Attendees will have a chance to use mowers, blowers, aerators, string trimmers, pumps, trenchers, sprayers and other machines at the outdoor equipment demonstrations on Nov. 10, the

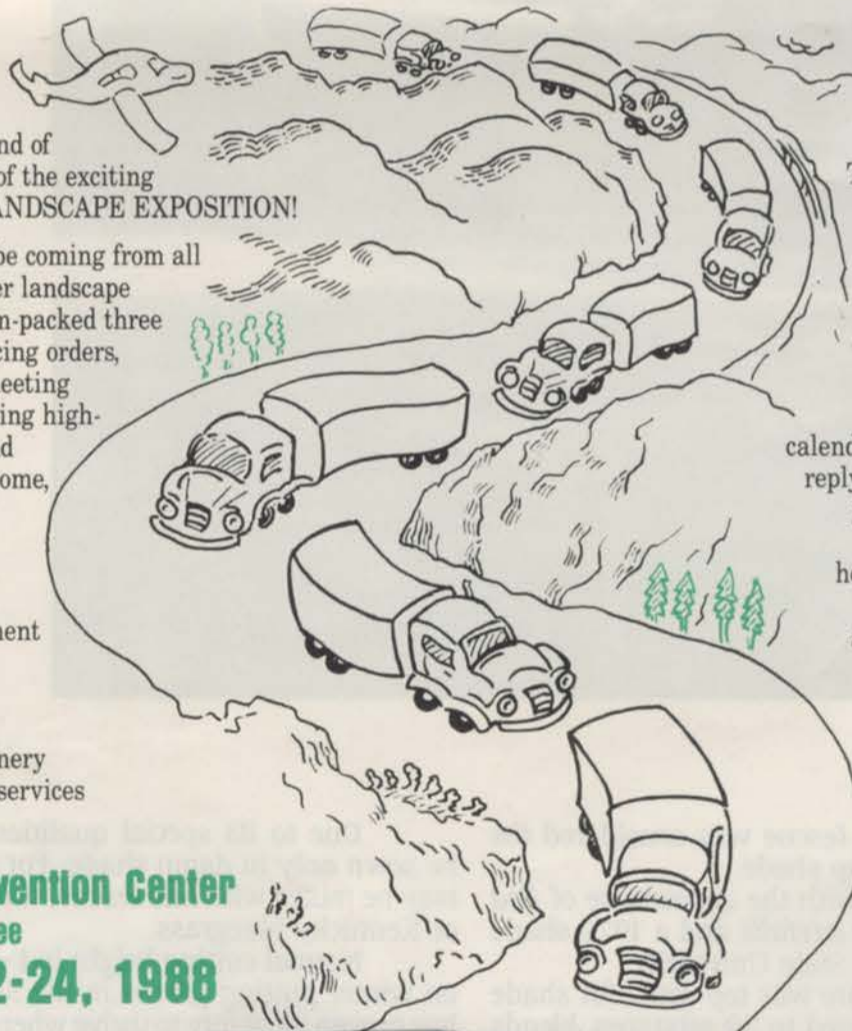
association reports.

In addition, seminars and their sponsors will include: 2-cycle engine maintenance, Lawn-Boy; preventative maintenance, Briggs & Stratton; pump repair and maintenance, FMC Corp. LCI

Sequel delayed

EDITOR'S NOTE—Part IV of Peter H. Connolly's series on selling your lawn care company has been postponed because of limited space. The piece, "Advertising your company for sale," will run next month. LCI

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Nashville, Tennessee
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Introducing a new service? Market it first

One of the keys to successful diversification of services is marketing new services properly. This requires "premarketing."

"Premarketing" refers to a marketing effort that takes place before the service is actually marketed.

For instance, you might be offering mowing in the spring season. Your marketing for this service will actually begin the previous fall.

But first consider the type of new services you will provide and how they fit into

the current marketing program.

Will the person you market your new service to be the same person you market your existing service to? This is an important point to consider when adding a service.

One lawn care company mistakenly decided the key variable was the use of chemical materials. They diversified into pest control, and later into carpet cleaning.

Both were disasters because the services were grouped incorrectly from a

consumer standpoint.

Outdoor versus indoor is a better generic grouping than chemical usage versus non-chemical usage.

Ease of entry

Consider the ease-of-entry into a new service.

How much competition is there? How much will it cost to get into the service? Will it be labor intensive? Capital intensive? Does the company have people in it currently who can actually run the new service?

Let's say we have chosen mowing/management as our new service. It was chosen because a survey of current customers showed a need for the service.

We also know our current customers have enough money to spend on the service. So not only do they want it, they can afford it.

When to start

The marketing plan should begin in the third quarter of the year. Except in very warm climates, lawns are mowed



McGary

Wandtke

About the Authors

Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke are senior partners with All-Green Management Associates, Columbus, Ohio.

three-fourths of a year to two-thirds of a year.

The third quarter is the early fall, which is the best time to start advertising for the following spring.

Some basic rules for premarketing are:

1) **Don't mix your old service with your new one if you are going to use brochures.** Make sure you have either a letter or a new piece of literature to explain your new service. If the new service is simply perceived as an "add-on" and not a serious effort, the customer won't buy what you have.

2) **Market to all the people who have received information from you in the past,** making sure that you get all of your current customers in this list. Some who didn't buy lawn care from you may buy mowing.

3) **Keep the piece or letter you are sending out as simple as possible.** Many companies go into long and complicated stories explaining why they go into new services. The consumer doesn't care that much. Keep it simple.

4) **Make an offer in the literature you send out.** Prepayment has been a standard way of raising cash. You should consider it as an offer when diversifying. Give the consumer some reason to accept your offer now, not some time in the distant future.

5) **For all of your current customers, include the price of the new service.** You should have information on your current customer, at least their lawn size. Use this information to make sure that you can make a concrete offer and one that the consumer can accept.

6) **If you are going to be offering something that doesn't deal with the lawn, do your homework on current customers' needs all during the first and second quarter of the season.** If, for instance, you are going to offer tree care, all your technicians should be marking down the type and size of trees in your current customers' yards and those yards close to them as well.

This information should then go to the office so that you can determine what kind of price you should charge and also if there is sufficient need in the geographical area you have chosen.

This type of marketing re-

Sabre *Poa trivialis* isn't just a good shade grass. It's the best.



Years ago fine fescue was considered the best performer in damp shade.

That changed with the appearance of *Poa annua*-free Sabre *Poa trivialis* and a 1979 shade tolerance trial at Ohio State University.

In that test Sabre was top-rated for shade tolerance when compared to 39 mixtures, blends and monostands of fine fescue, ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue.

An excerpt from trial data said: "Sabre, which had the highest overall seasonal ratings, maintained the most consistent quality throughout the season."

Due to its special qualities Sabre should be sown only in damp shade. For this purpose it may be mixed with fine fescue, turf-type ryegrass or Kentucky bluegrass.

Normal cutting height is 1-1/2 inches, but on winter putting greens in the Southern U.S., it has proven its ability to thrive when cut at 3/16th.

One of the first domestic varieties to be registered with the U.S. Plant Variety Protection Office, Sabre is both disease-resistant and hardy.

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search is rather simple but can save you from a lot of assumptions that may turn out to be untrue.

7) Plan the mailing. You may mail the first wave to your existing customer base, with the second one going to all those people to whom you have mailed something in the past year.

You might want to send out everything at once, but this might tie up your office staff if you get a surprising response. Generally, a tiered set of mailings is better than mailing everything at once.

8) Don't expect one mailing to produce much. Many people get discouraged when they do a direct mailing of a new service and people don't respond. Remember that changing the consumers' perceptions takes time. You must do multiple mailings to the same people, which is why you shouldn't make the pieces very expensive, just professional.

9) Having done all your mailings, you should begin to telesell your current customers. You can try to get a sale in September, but you might want to think about getting an agreement to let you call them early next spring. This doesn't give you any cash, but their agreement to take your call next spring should give you a rough estimate about the number of people you might have to service.

Remember to try for the sale first, then revert to asking if it would be appropriate to call in the spring.

10) Telesell the rest of the people on your mailing list. Your list should include those people who are next door neighbors to those who bought your lawn care service this year. Work on these first. The names are easy to get with a cross telephone book.

11) Follow up in the winter. You may have to call three times to get a response. Keep going until you hear either yes or no. LCI

OBJECT

from Page 1

- Cover sheets must be sent to customers with detailed product information.

- Pesticide product labels must be sent to customers.

- Customers have the right to cancel service contracts without cause during the initial year.

- The contract must be renewed in writing every year.

LCOs also want to delete the mandatory "Persons are cautioned not to enter this property" on the sign.

Don Burton, spokesman for the New York State Lawncare Association, says the new regs show some compromise over last year's proposal, which called for signs every 12 feet.

The association submitted its objections to the DEC's Environmental Board. LCI

Nitrogen crucial for turfgrass recovery

LINCOLN, NEB.—If the Drought of 1988 is heralding in an era of exceptionally hot, dry summers, turfgrass managers are advised to know that nitrogen plays a crucial role in turf recovery.

Robert Shearman, Ph.D., turfgrass specialist at the University of Nebraska, says turfgrass managers should continue normal fertilization programs through the dry, hot months. Studies show that recovery is more complete in turf with adequate levels of nitrogen.

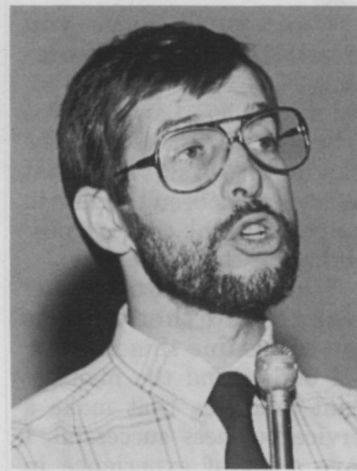
Shearman advocates using

slow-release sources that are low in salt content.

This past summer, many turfgrass managers discontinued fertilization during the hot months. Reason being that higher nitrogen levels will hasten wilting and dormancy of turf.

However, Shearman says the turf will recover sooner with the standard rates of nitrogen.

Potassium will not benefit drought stress recovery, Shearman notes, since its primary benefit occurs before dormancy. Potassium fertil-



Shearman: Turfgrass needs its nitrogen.

ization is best used to avoid drought symptoms and reduce water use prior to dormancy.

And as soon as growth resumes, so should mowing. Shearman says mowing causes a dense canopy that is crucial in slowing down vapor loss. Mowing should continue if there is any growth at all.

Shearman also advocates late summer and early fall aeration.

Dry weather causes a higher level of debris accumulation which must be broken down. Late season fertilization is also crucial to recovery. LCI

Overseeding? put the seed where it belongs... in the soil, for perfect germination.

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The unit is carried on two heavy-duty open mesh steel rollers that serve to cover the seed and firm the seed bed.

Conveniently located controls give easy, comfortable operation. Designed for exceptional performance, the LM67 can seed up to 2 acres per hour.

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SERVICE

from Page 1

may not be evident, he says, since Ecolab uses a different accounting system than the former ChemLawn management did.

With this difference in mind, he expects ChemLawn to have a better third quarter this year than last.

Shannon shared his thoughts in a recent interview with *LAWN CARE INDUSTRY*. Here are excerpts.

How do you feel about your appointment as president of ChemLawn?

Having the opportunity to be president of ChemLawn is something that any manager would really be excited about. It's a great company; it

founded an industry and has been industry leader for a long time.

What goals have you identified for the company?

I think ChemLawn's goal is to be second to none from the standpoint of service. That hasn't always been the case in the past. I think that is a possibility for the future.

What is it about your background that enables you to assume this role?

I understand the management practices that make a service business successful. I have a lot of experience in building management teams. My challenge is to blend the lawn care talent—which is very long in this company—with the other management



Shannon: You get back customers you lose on price.

ingredients that are required to go to the next stage. This industry is going to change dramatically if it follows the pattern of service industries. You're going to need different management skills.

What pattern is it you are referring to?

First there is the initial growth stage. Everyone sells the same product across the board to a non-sophisticated market. Then the market matures. The market is about to develop and there are people in the industry who fully understand that and are acting accordingly.

Can you describe what the industry is going to be like?

It's going to much more full service. This is an industry that has produced something and said (to the customer) "This is what you want." The next stage is one where the customer tells us what they want and we serve the customer. My job is to make sure we have the management team that's able to manage change.

What have you done to bring this about?

We have tried to reconstitute the staff and the job assignments for people within the branches to facilitate giving better service. That hasn't been easy. We had an uneven success in implementing the

reorganization. In retrospect, we were all a little naive thinking we could accomplish wholesale change in such a short period of time. We paid for it in weak profits and early season confusion. There is still a lot of fine tuning to be done. Senior management must be sending the right vision of service.

Can you say more about the reorganization?

We reorganized every job in the branch. This involved adding more people. We also enhanced telemarketing in all the markets.

Are there more people now than before the acquisition? If so, how many?

Yes. I'd say somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of thousand.

What were the major mistakes made by the previous management?

I wouldn't touch that with a ten-foot pole. I just don't think it's good business practice to talk about what other people's mistakes were.

Can you say what the major changes have been?

Yes. One, a clear message on customer service. I don't think the organization uniformly carried that through. Two, this is a field-based business, which means there is a tremendous importance on field development. The key players are the branch management and their management team, on up through the regions. Three, the message that we clearly gave this year and a valid message in a service business is that the game is a service game and not a price game. Service is a value concept. Our goal is to provide the best value.

What has been the financial impact of the summer drought?

Essentially, it's going to be neutral. We've done a lot to communicate to our customers during the drought.

What are the industry's major problems today?

One is poor service. Whether it's actual or perceived, the lawn care business gets a bad rap. I do think there are a lot of people out there who aren't giving good service.

Is public perception of the lawn care industry and the fear of chemicals still a major issue?

Management systems can appropriately manage the use of these chemicals. We have an environmental compliance

program that is second to none in the industry. In my judgment, the problem is well managed. Now let's go to the perception side. There are people in society who would just as soon not have chemicals anywhere. These people want to see regulation. We have no opposition to intelligent regulation. That's what we already do. But you get back to the fact that the most unregulated person is the do-it-yourselfer. You deal with the perception problem responsibly. Give facts and work for effective regulation.

Is the public perception problem a serious one for the industry?

Yes, and I think there are clear requirements for an industry to manage chemicals responsibly, inform customers and cooperate with the regulatory process. I do not, however, see the current level of concern as a major problem on the demand side.

Will ChemLawn continue to open new branches?

The company plans to grow. I'm unsure about how many new branches we'll have.

Will the company be acquiring other companies?

We are the dominant company in most major regions. Regional acquisitions to get hold of a market don't make a lot of sense for us. Spot acquisitions to fill in markets are a realistic possibility.

What about franchises?

That's an area where we need to do more work. Most franchising has been in smaller markets. I much prefer that method. The company can control service levels and profits better (through branches).

What are the company's plans in terms of its tree/shrub and indoor pest control services?

Tree and shrub makes a lot of sense for us. Ecolab is already in the pest business in the institutional market and ChemLawn is in the residential market, so this will continue also.

What about additional, new services?

It's too early to tell. How successful has the mowing operation been? I don't think the jury is totally in on that yet.

Can ChemLawn be successful in the commercial lawn care market without providing mowing?

Yes. That does not mean, however, that we won't provide mowing.

How successful has the menu offering of lawn care programs been?

Very successful. What has customer reaction to the price increases been?

There is no evidence that the price increases that were implemented had any system-wide significant impact on customer base. LCI



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101	116	131	146	161	176	191	206	221	236	251	266	281	296	311	326	341
102	117	132	147	162	177	192	207	222	237	252	267	282	297	312	327	342
103	118	133	148	163	178	193	208	223	238	253	268	283	298	313	328	343
104	119	134	149	164	179	194	209	224	239	254	269	284	299	314	329	344
105	120	135	150	165	180	195	210	225	240	255	270	285	300	315	330	345
106	121	136	151	166	181	196	211	226	241	256	271	286	301	316	331	346
107	122	137	152	167	182	197	212	227	242	257	272	287	302	317	332	347
108	123	138	153	168	183	198	213	228	243	258	273	288	303	318	333	348
109	124	139	154	169	184	199	214	229	244	259	274	289	304	319	334	349
110	125	140	155	170	185	200	215	230	245	260	275	290	305	320	335	350
111	126	141	156	171	186	201	216	231	246	261	276	291	306	321	336	351
112	127	142	157	172	187	202	217	232	247	262	277	292	307	322	337	352
113	128	143	158	173	188	203	218	233	248	263	278	293	308	323	338	353
114	129	144	159	174	189	204	219	234	249	264	279	294	309	324	339	354
115	130	145	160	175	190	205	220	235	250	265	280	295	310	325	340	355

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

SEPTEMBER 1988

This card void after Nov. 15, 1988

1. CHECK BELOW YOUR PRIMARY BUSINESS AT THIS LOCATION:

A. LAWN CARE COMPANY: Read each choice before answering.

- 10** Chemical lawn care company
- 20** Mowing/management lawn care company and/or landscape contractor
- 30** Both chemical lawn care company and mowing/management lawn care company and/or landscape contractor

B. SUPPLIER

- 50** Chemical and equipment dealer and/or distributor

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NLA seeks entries for awards

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The National Landscape Association of the American Association of Nurserymen is presently accepting entries for its 19th annual national Residential Landscape Award Program. Entry deadline is Oct. 24, 1988.

All single-family landscaped residential properties—regardless of size or cost—are eligible.

Categories of entry include: single family homes, entrances, active use areas, and passive use areas.

The purpose of the program is to recognize landscape professionals who create the design and those who are responsible for its execution and management.

Awards include a Superior Award, a Certificate of Merit, a Regional Merit Certificate, and Best Use of Plant Material in a Private Home.

Projects chosen for national recognition will be announced February, 1989 at the Landscape/Garden Center Management Clinic in Louisville, Ky.

Entry forms are available from NLA at 1250 I St., N.W., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20005. LCI

CRITIC

from Page 1

board member Roger Funk.

"Our industry has taken a combative role and that didn't work," says Funk. "I think if we talk with one another, we're not necessarily going to agree, but there's less of a chance of the cold war continuing."

Another purpose in hosting O'Brien is to let her know the industry is professional and takes safety seriously, says Doug Moody, PLCAA assistant executive director.

O'Brien, whose Ph.D. is in botany, has been involved in lobbying activities to restrict pesticide use. She is editor of NCAP's quarterly journal, *Journal of Pesticide Reform*.

Her talk is titled: "Avoiding trouble with pesticides: Using alternatives," the final day of the conference, Nov. 9, in the 1:30 to 3:15 p.m. time slot.

Also scheduled then are Wendell Mullison, Ph.D., a Dow Chemical Co. consultant; Funk, Ph.D., technical and human resources director of the Davey Tree Expert Co.; and Thomas Watschke, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University.

Funk was responsible for finding someone from an anti-pesticide group for the show. "If we get the right person, it's going to be a very positive part of the program." LCI

Sept.

■ **World Fertilizer Conference,** Sept. 18-20, Century Plaza Hotel, Beverly Hills, Calif. Contact: TFI, 1015 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; (202) 861-4900.

■ **International Pesticide Applicators Association Convention and Trade Show,** Sept. 28-30, Red Lion Inn, 300 112th Ave., Bellevue, Wash. Contact: Bill Harlan, PO Box 681, Kirkland, Wash.

8083; (206) 823-2600.

Oct.

■ **ALCA Seminar—Essentials of Landscape Supervision,** Oct. 7, Executive Inn, Seattle, Wash. Contact: Martha Lindauer, Associated Landscape Contractors of America, 405 N. Washington St., Falls Church, Va. 22046; (704) 241-4004.

■ **Florida Turfgrass Association Annual Conference and Show,**

Oct. 9-12, Curtis Hixon Convention Center and Hyatt Regency Hotel, Tampa, Fla. Contact: FTGA 302 S. Graham Ave., Orlando, Fla. 32803-6332; (407) 898-6721.

■ **University of California Cooperative Extension Palm Tree Management Seminar,** Oct. 19, Oxnard Community Center, Oxnard, Calif. Contact: Jim Downer, UC Cooperative Extension, 800 S. Victoria Ave., Ventura, Calif. 93009; (805) 654-2924.

■ **Landscape Exposition,**

Oct. 22-24, Nashville Convention Center, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: Becky LeRew, Edgell Expositions, 50 Washington St., Norwalk, Conn. 06854; (800) 243-2815.

■ **ALCA Seminar—Art of Management,** Oct. 22, Milwaukee Area Technical College. Contact: Martha Lindauer, Associated Landscape Contractors of America, 405 N. Washington St., Falls Church, Va. 22046; (704) 241-4004.

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Fall fallout follows from fierce drought

Art Johnson, Sr., loves being self-employed because it means he only has to work half a day.

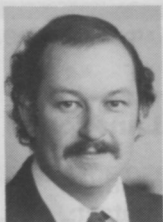
"All we have to do is figure out which 12 hours we are going to work," says Art, who is owner/partner at Mapledale Landscaping in Chardon, Ohio.

Art was musing over how some jobs had to be delayed in the spring because of cold and wet weather, and then he had to lay people off in the summer because of the Great Drought of '88.

Mike Rider, president of Rider Tree and Shrub Care in Racine, Wis., didn't see rain all summer until July 16—which happened to be the day of his outdoor wedding and reception.

Chances are Art and Mike aren't the only readers whose lives were made more difficult during the drought.

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY didn't escape: Journalist Steve Berta was driving me around Montecito, Calif., as we sought to take a photograph of a model xeriscaped



JAMES E. GUYETTE
MANAGING
EDITOR

garden. Unfortunately, a ferocious, rare, thunderstorm blew up—which resulted in Steve and I trying to get a "drought picture" as it was pouring down rain.

It was not a pretty sight. Even as fall approaches,

the fallout from the drought continues.

In some ways the drought is a plus. Renovation work will increase, irrigation systems will most likely be an easier sale in some climates, and cleanups and other work should be on the upswing.

Roto-Hoe's Debby Wenner reports that she's seeing lots of interest in her company's chipper and shredder line as dead branches and trees dot the landscapes.

One would not be terribly surprised if the main topic of

conversation with your clients is the drought—and what next summer will be like.

For starters, if you sell irrigation you can make a pitch for your product line.

Jim Utzinger, a horticulturist at Ohio State University, even suggests installing a drip irrigation system on a drought-prone vegetable garden.

It will keep the plants growing while using less water.

According to Jim, the garden plants suffering the most damage this year were lima beans (who'd want to eat them anyway?), peppers and tomatoes.

Also hit were thin-leaved plants such as lettuce, and expect to eat bitter cucumbers.

"It's not a bad idea to consider that we may have another hot, dry summer next year and to prepare for it now," says Jim.

You may suggest that your customers look at different varieties of vegetables—or different plants altogether.

Jim says that Lemon or some Burpless cucumbers are less bitter-tasting and more resistant to heat. And plants such as okra, collards, kale and cabbage have thicker leaves that increase heat tolerance.

Tecumseh has a subsidiary called the Little Giant Pump Co., and that firm makes a nifty gadget called the Little Giant Water Saver Kit. This is a pump device that moves 3 gallons a minute.

The company says it's perfect for re-using water from bathtubs, washing machines and other sources of water that might be dirty, but too dirty to be used on a garden.

(Avoid putting too much soap on any plants, though.)

And for people working out in the field, while doing those renovations you can entertain yourselves by debating the merits of rear-tine tillers versus the front-tine variety.

This became one of my favorite controversies after witnessing such a discussion.

Our hero is Jim Donofrio, a stone mason who was one day cheerfully recounting how a certain task was made easier with a tiller.

A wise guy in the room asked, "Was it a front-tine tiller or a rear-tine tiller?"

Jim thought for a second, shrugged, and replied, "A front-tine tiller."

The wise guy challenged, "I hear that front-tine tillers aren't as good as rear-tine tillers."

"You may be absolutely right," answered Jim, "but it sure as hell beats two guys and a shovel."

James E. Guyette

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NEW PRODUCTS



Measure soil moisture with CPN portable unit

The Irams Soil Moisture Analyzer is a portable instrument that accurately measures in-situ moisture content of any soil, according to CPN Corp., Martinez, Calif.

The Irams uses the principle of Time Domain Reflectometry (TDR) to measure the dielectric constant of a soil. An internal microprocessor converts dielectric constant to percent volumetric water content.

The measurement is essentially independent of soil type, density, salt content and temperature.

No licensing is required to operate the machine, nor is specialized training or site calibration needed. LCI

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Hako Verticuttor has large capacity hopper

Hako International, Virginia Beach, Va., is introducing the Verticuttor.

The 30-inch machine has a 7.1-bushel capacity hopper.

Its blades can be adjusted for the proper spacing of cuts and depth penetration required for each particular dethatching job, according to the company.

The Verticuttor has electronic ignition, plus two forward speeds and one reverse speed. LCI

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Kubota's new tractor is most powerful in class

The new G620016-hp diesel lawn and garden tractor is the most powerful model in its class at Kubota Tractor Corp.,

Compton, Calif., according to the company.

The G6200 comes equipped with a hydrostatic transmission that allows the driver to go between forward and reverse by merely shifting foot pressure from toe to heel.

The 3-cylinder tractor comes with a standard hydraulic midlift for use with 40-, 44- and 48-inch mowing attachments.

It can operate a number of implements, including a front blade, rotary tiller and snow blower.

To reduce the chance of operator injury, the G6200 has a safety control that shuts off

the engine if the driver gets off the seat.

Options include an hour meter, three-point hitch and PTO. LCI

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Special printed invoices for chemical lawn care

The New England Business Service, Groton, Mass., has developed an invoice especially for chemical lawn care companies.

The three-part snapset reduces a technician's paperwork by having boxes to check for services rendered. LCI

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Front tine tillers come in three models

Snapper Power Equipment, McDonough, Ga., is marketing three front tine tiller models.

The tillers come with 3-, 4- and 5-hp engines, and they

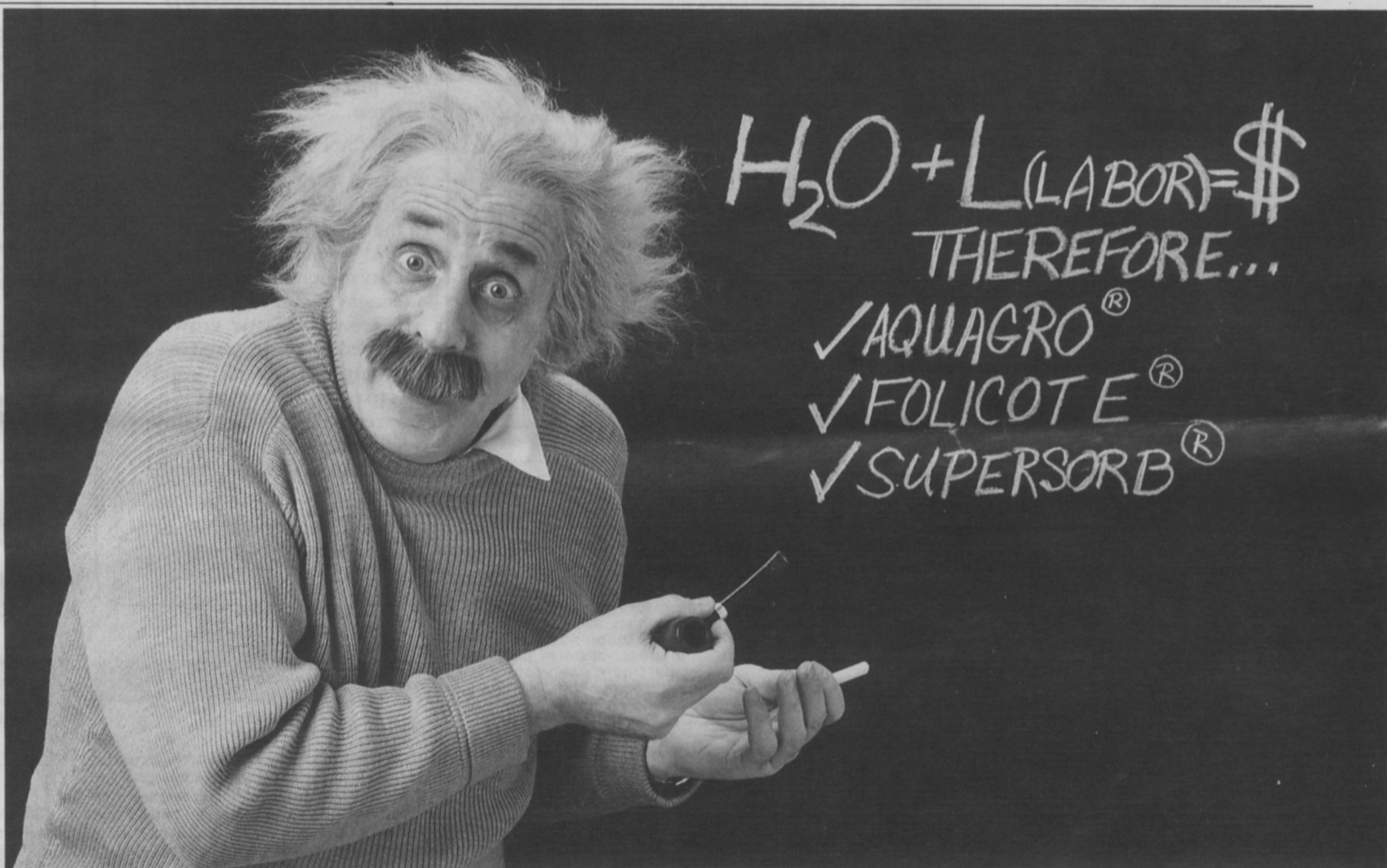
feature self-sharpening tines.

The heavy steel structural parts, reinforced chain and gear transmission sealed in lubricant, sealed bearings on the rotor shaft and steel belt guard provide durability, according to the company.

The tillers convert to walking tractors by removing the tines and replacing them with 16-inch lug tires. This allows you to use the tiller-furrower to make seed beds and raised beds; the cultivator; and the dozer blade for moving loose soil and light snow.

The products come with a two year limited warranty. LCI

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Parmley to lead PLCAA in 1988/1989; officers named

ALPHARETTA, GA.—Robert F. Parmley, general manager of the Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, Inc. franchise in Wheeling, Ill., was recently named president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America for 1988/1989.

The board of directors approved its new slate of officers and directors at its meeting on Aug. 8. The new slate will be voted on by the membership in attendance at the annual business meeting in New Orleans in November.

Other nominations are:

Vice president-elect—Joseph L. Winland, vice president of group support, Tru Green Corp., Atlanta, Ga.

Secretary/treasurer—David W. Sek, sales representative, Monroe Tree & Lawntender, Inc., Rochester, N.Y.

Directors, appointed to three year terms, are: Bruce Fowler, general manager of franchising, ChemLawn Services Corp., Columbus, Ohio; Neal A. DeAngelo, president, Lawn Specialties, Hazleton, Pa.; Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawncare, Inc. Sterling Heights, Mich.; John R. Robinson, president, Green Drop Ltd., Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The associate director, who serves a one-year term, will be elected by the new board at its first meeting in New Orleans. LCI

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Lawn care company interested in buying lawn care company(s). Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, or West Palm Beach area. Write LCI Box 200. 9/88

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